

Reworking Rewards for Success

Rewards are one common way to improve child behavior. Rewards are a great tool, but also have the potential to spiral out of control and not work well. The tips below will help you use rewards in a way that is manageable and effective for most kids.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ***Being too vague*** – It's important your child knows *exactly* how rewards will be earned. If you give rewards for “being good” or “behaving” your child might be confused about what that actually means. The simpler, clearer, and more specific you are, the easier it will be for your child to earn rewards.
- ***Expecting too much at once*** – Rewards are a kind of teaching, and just like with other things you teach to children, learning takes time. Asking for perfect behavior or long stretches without slip-ups probably won't work.
- ***Waiting too long to give rewards*** – The longer a reward is given after the behavior that earned it, the less it will help your child learn.
- ***Rewards that are too big*** – Big rewards are exciting, but usually can't be sustained. Because learning is a gradual process, you'll probably need to give many rewards to get the results you want.

Building Effective Rewards

- ***Be specific*** – The clearer, simpler, and more specific you are about how your child will earn rewards the easier it will be for him/her to do what you want. It's best to focus on what you want your child to *do*, not what you *don't* want them to do.
- ***Target small improvements*** – For rewards to work, your child has to be able to earn them. This means giving rewards for small and achievable improvements is best. As your child's behavior improves, gradually increase your expectations for earning rewards.
- ***Give rewards quickly and frequently*** – Try to provide the reward as soon as you can after the behavior that earns it. When starting out, try to reward behaviors you like whenever you see them.
- ***Use small, easier rewards*** – Because we want reward to be given quickly and frequently, it's best to focus on smaller and easily given rewards. These should be things that could be earned most any day.

Other Tips

- ***Work together*** – Children will be more invested in rewards if they have input.
- ***Restrict access to rewards*** – Make sure the rewards that you select to be earned can be withheld. If your child is able to get them without earning them, then there is no reason to improve behavior.
- ***Adapt rewards as needed*** – Add new rewards if your child loses interest. Modify expectations to ensure that behavior is improving while the child is also earning rewards.

Ideas for Rewards

Here are some ideas for good rewards. You can add to these lists with custom rewards your child might like.

Extra Privileges	Parent-Child Activities	Things
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying up late • Sleeping in • Having a friend over • Skipping a chore • Pick a meal • Choose what to watch on TV • Extra computer time • Extra outside time • Paint fingernails • Wear cologne or perfume • Wear jewelry • Bubble bath • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play a game • Play dress-up • Go to the park • Have a slumber party • Make a snack or meal together • Ride bikes • Go for a walk • Create an art project • Blow bubbles • Play in the sprinkler • Fly a kite • Read a book • Look at family pictures • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art supplies • Clothes • Costume jewelry • Temporary tattoos • Trading cards • Small toys or trinkets • Special snacks • Music • Games • School supplies • Room decorations • Comic books • Stickers/stamps • Special certificate • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____

Please note that resources such as this are intended to offer guidance and suggestions. However, no claim is made that the information provided is appropriate for any specific child or family. Many families will find this information helpful and sufficient for addressing child rearing issues. Others will not. Parents are encouraged to talk with their child's pediatrician or seek help from a mental health professional if needed.

Prepping for Success

For rewards to work the best they can, it's important to think through how you want to use them. Answer these questions when beginning to use rewards.

1. What behavior do you want your child to do more of? Remember to be specific so you know when to give the reward.

2. How often does your child already do what you want to reward? What would represent a small improvement to you?

3. What reward(s) are you going to use? Make sure you come up with something you can give quickly and easily.

4. When will you talk to your child about starting the rewards system?
