

How to Use Rewards

Use a System: There are a number of ways to do this; i.e., token board, point system, allowance or pay for jobs/tasks, sticker board, puzzle token system, etc. A system will keep you and your child on track, showing how many points/tokens need to be earned before there is a break and/or reward.

Set Expectations: Your child should know what behaviors earn points. If you set the expectations early you can always adjust later. It may be helpful to have a running list of behaviors or tasks and how many points/tokens each will earn. Knowing exactly what to do to earn points helps make the system reliable and predictable for both the child and parent. Remember to praise specific behaviors. You want your child to know what they are being rewarded for specifically so that they repeat those behaviors in the future. Instead of saying “Wow! You are so smart!”, say “Wow! Great job showing your work on your math and finishing it!”.

Meet Your Child at Their CURRENT Level: Remember, this is a strange time for all of us. We may need to adjust our expectations and reinforce lower effort or easier behaviors. Instead of giving a point for completing a whole task or number of tasks, you may need to give them a token just for starting and another one or two as they are working.

Choose Rewards that Your Child Wants: Rewards should be chosen as a team. Your child should be the main influence in what rewards are being earned. You can suggest or adjust rewards based on availability, monetary value, time/effort needed to procure or use the reward, time with the reward, etc.

Access To the Reward Should Be Limited: The reward is something your child wants right now. If your child is able to access the same item at other times of the day for “free” the reward will not be as valuable to them and may hinder the system. The longer you withhold a reward, the more valuable it will be. For example: I love chocolate! If I have not had chocolate in a couple days I am more willing to do something to receive chocolate. If I had chocolate all day, I am not likely to engage in behaviors that will get me chocolate because I am satisfied. Do your best to agree on multiple rewards so they have a variety of things to work towards.

Don't Take Away Earned Rewards: Rewards should be delivered as soon as they are earned and should not be taken away due to undesirable behavior. The reward should be tied to specific behaviors. If your child gets in trouble for doing a different behavior, the reward they earned for the appropriate behavior should not be taken away. If you take away rewards, your child may not see the point in “working the system” or continuing their ‘good behavior’.

Praise and Reward Often: Praise should be given to your child throughout the day. Catch them ‘being good’ as often as possible. Praise will let your child know you like what they are doing and will encourage them to continue engaging in those desired behaviors. Small rewards should be earned many times throughout their day. You may want to give more frequent rewards to motivate your child through more difficult tasks. Also, the younger your child is, chronologically and developmentally, the more frequent the rewards should be earned.

Make It Visual: You and your child should be able to see their progress toward their reward. You can explore making a colorful or interactive system to track their progress with a visual for what they are working for. Some families like to use a whiteboard/sticker chart/paper system taped to the wall or fridge, while others get more creative and make interactive systems (i.e., lego tower, a puzzle, a large jar or tube to pour water in, etc.).