

PARENT HANDOUT: REWARDING GOOD BEHAVIOR

WHAT IS REWARDING GOOD BEHAVIOR?

- ▶ Rewarding Good Behavior involves tracking your child's behavior and providing specific rewards for good behavior. Rewards encourage your child to follow rules and directions by increasing your child's motivation to act in ways you like.
- ▶ This strategy helps parents and children set clear goals. Parents typically use a chart to track their child's progress, which also provides children with a visual representation of their accomplishments.
- ▶ Families do best with rewards that are simple, sustainable, and desirable to their children. Rewards can be easy and free, extra time with you, playing a game, or screen time. What matters is that you work together to choose rewards you are willing to give and that your child is motivated to earn.
- ▶ This skill is effective with children of all ages, as well as for many different kinds of misbehavior.



HERE'S HOW TO REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOR AT HOME

1

Create a list of 3-5 desired behaviors to start. Be specific about what your child needs to do to earn a reward (e.g., "make bed before breakfast"). Include behaviors with a range of difficulty: some your child already does most of the time (speak nicely to sister") and some your child struggles to do (do homework from 3:00-4:00").

2

Create a list of at least 5-10 rewards. Think of as many ideas as you can. Include a range of reward types (items, activities, privileges) and sizes/costs (free, small, medium, large). Have rewards you can give every day (e.g., extra screen or story time) and once a week (e.g., going out to eat), as well as some "big ticket" rewards that take longer to earn (e.g., going to a sporting event or movies once a month). Use our list of reward ideas to get started. Be sure to only include rewards you are willing and able to provide if your child displays ideal behavior. Get your child's input to be sure they are motivated to earn the rewards on your list.

3

Link behaviors to rewards. Decide which behaviors earn which rewards, with easier tasks earning smaller rewards and harder tasks, bigger rewards (e.g., If your child makes their bed, they can earn 5 extra minutes of screen time that day. If they help do dishes after dinner, they can earn 15 extra minutes. If they do their chores for a full month, they can earn a trip to the amusement park.). Younger children do best with rewards they earn daily, while older children may prefer to "bank" points to earn bigger rewards over time. With older children, you can also use simple "behavior contracts", where completing a desired behavior earns a reward and not completing it means no reward (e.g., If Liam completes his chores without arguing, he earns 20 minutes of video game time; if he argues, he cannot have video game time and must still complete his chores).

4

Make a rewards or behavior tracking chart. Make a chart to track your child's behavior each day, including which rewards they can earn and how often they can earn them. Younger children often like earning stickers for each good behavior, while older children may prefer a checkmark or point system. With younger children, you can make the chart together, which is an opportunity to bond and praise any positive behaviors you see. Be creative and make it a fun project. Use our examples for inspiration.

HOW TO REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOR AT HOME (continued)

5

Provide rewards as soon as possible. When your child earns a reward, be sure to give it to them. Try to provide rewards as soon as possible after your child earns them (*but never before!*). This will help your child connect their good behavior to the positive feeling of earning a reward.

6

Post the chart somewhere you and your child will see it regularly. Putting your chart in a busy place in your home, like on the refrigerator, will help you remember to update it every day.

7

Be consistent and remember to praise good behavior. Praise your child whenever their behavior is good or earns them a reward. The more parents reliably praise good behavior and provide promised rewards, the better children will feel and the faster behavior will improve. See Disruptive Behavior Skill 2 for tips (Praising Good Behavior).

8

Adjust the rewards list over time. As your child's behavior improves or certain rewards lose their value, you can adjust your rewards chart to maintain your child's motivation and progress. For example, after your child is able to consistently do chores 2-3 times/week, you can increase the goal to 4-5 times/week.

Maya's Behavior Chart

Goal Behavior	Rewards	Frequency	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Make the bed before breakfast	5 extra minutes of screen time	Can earn once per day	★	★	★			★	
Put homework in backpack before school	Extra bedtime story	Can earn once per day	★	★	★	★			
Do 1 hour of homework without complaining	Cook meal together	Can earn once per day			★			★	
Speak politely to parents for entire day	Have a friend over for dinner	Can earn once per week				★			



My Behavior Chart

Goal
Behavior

Rewards

Frequency

M

T

W

Th

F

Sa

Su



PARENT HANDOUT: REWARDING GOOD BEHAVIOR TIPS



HOW CAN REWARDING GOOD BEHAVIOR HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ Rewarding Good Behavior involves systematically giving your child a reward when they do things you want, such as clean their room, do homework, or use good manners. Rewards incentivize your child to behave and make it more likely that they will do so in the future.
- ▶ This technique helps you create a clear, organized, and fair system to track your child's behaviors and provide rewards. You and your child decide together what they need to do to earn rewards, which will help them focus on behaving and decrease opportunities for arguments between you.
- ▶ While many children behave better when parents use skills in our Disruptive Behavior guide, such as Bonding Time (Skill 1), Praising Good Behavior (Skill 2), and Shifting Attention (Skill 3), other children may need a bigger push. Rewarding Good Behavior can give them that extra nudge. When rewards are carefully chosen and only given for good behavior, you may be surprised how well your child will behave to earn what they want!

REWARD IDEAS

	Daily/Small Rewards	Weekly or Monthly/Bigger Rewards
Ages 3-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to park Read extra bedtime story Play game or do puzzle Watch short video Play with bubbles Take photos Play dress up Have a dance party 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have play date with friend Do art project Go out to eat Take trip to the zoo Camp in the backyard Go to the library Choose dinner for the family Bake treat together

	Daily/Small Rewards	Weekly or Monthly/Bigger Rewards
Ages 6-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play with friends Spend time with just parents Cook meal together Play cards Go to library Play video game Have extra treat after dinner Make craft together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a sleepover Go for a hike Go swimming, bowling, or biking Go out to eat Plan family outing Visit a museum Go to the movies Decorate bedroom

PARENT HANDOUT: REWARDING GOOD BEHAVIOR TIPS



COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

I wasn't raised with rewards and don't like the idea of "bribing" my child.

All children are different, and yours may need some extra motivation to behave the way you want. Your family may already have ways of informally "rewarding" your child, such as promising your child something when they do well in school or follow rules. Here, you're implementing a predetermined, clear, and consistent system to improve your child's behavior, increasing your influence over your child's behavior and keeping you both accountable.

Why should I reward my child for behaving the way they're supposed to?

Just as adults appreciate being rewarded for their hard work, children respond well to tangible incentives for good behavior. Rewarding Good Behavior helps you shift your attention toward the things your child does right. They provide another way to bond with your child and increase positive time together.

This seems like it will take a lot of time. I'm too busy!

This may take more time at first, but eventually it becomes part of families' routines. Most parents actually gain time back, because they spend less time managing their children's misbehavior. Over time, parents often find children do not need rewards to behave.

I started giving rewards, and now my child constantly bugs me about them.

Remember that the goal here is to reward good behavior. This means that if your child is not completing one of the behaviors on your list, they do not earn the associated reward. Do not give in to whining, complaining, or tantruming about rewards. Do not give rewards for behaviors not on the list. Set clear expectations with your rewards chart and stick to it.

I tried this, and it didn't work. My child isn't motivated by rewards.

Be patient. It may take time for your child to adjust. Using the strategies we suggest, most parents find that they are able to use rewards much more effectively at home.

Here are some common mistakes parents make when using rewards.

- 1 **Giving your child what they want** without having to work for it (e.g., Will gets screen time whether he does his homework or not. Sometimes, his parents even let him watch TV first as long as he promises to do his homework afterward. He usually doesn't.)
- 2 Making the **goal behavior too challenging or setting reward "bar" too high** high (e.g., Maria is late to school almost every day. In order for her to earn a reward, she must be on time to school every day for a month. After a few days, she is late again. She gives up trying, because she has already "lost" her chance at that month's reward.)
- 3 Choosing **the wrong rewards** (e.g., Anna can stay up 20 minutes past her bedtime whenever she is able to express herself calmly instead of arguing or swearing; however, Anna would actually rather earn some time with friends after school, so she doesn't bother to work on her attitude or language.)
- 4 Choosing **reward options that are too big or too expensive** (e.g., At first, Mark gets a new video game every time he does his chores. Soon his parents are unable to afford new games, and he stops doing chores.)
- 5 **Waiting too long to give rewards** (e.g., Jenny only gets her rewards at the end of the week, no matter when she behaves well. It's too hard for her to delay gratification for that long, so she doesn't try that hard.)

