

# Using Rewards to Improve Behavior

## What is the concern?

Children often do not do the simple day-to-day tasks that they are asked to do. As a result, family life may become difficult or disrupted. Often when children do what parents ask, parents leave them alone. But good behavior can fade away if it never gets any attention or a reward. Parents can use rewards to help children increase desired behaviors and decrease unwanted behaviors.

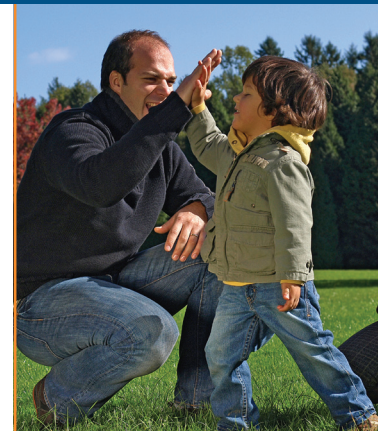
## What is a reward system?

Rewards are not bribes. Parents give rewards for desired behavior when children follow rules or directions and when they show improved behavior. The parent, not the child, sets up rewards. Rewards can be used to increase a positive behavior or decrease a negative one.

## What kind of rewards can I use?

- **Social rewards** are rewards of someone's time and attention. A parent's attention can be the most rewarding for a child. Show attention with physical rewards such as hugs and kisses, as well as verbal rewards such as praise. Use activity rewards like playing a game, telling a story, or going on a bike ride together. All of these rewards cost a small amount of time and attention, yet help keep up desired behavior over time.
- **Symbolic rewards** are rewards that can be "banked" – like stickers on a chart, poker chips, or pennies in a jar. The child earns one for good behavior. Then, as your child earns more, he "buys" a reward activity later. For example, staying up 15 minutes past bedtime might cost 15 stickers or an extra half hour playing a favorite game might cost 10 stickers. Praise your child for good behavior whenever awarding one of these stickers or pennies.
- **Tangible rewards** are rewards of things like treats, toys, or money. Be sure to combine social praise with these types of rewards. It's best to use these when you start teaching your child something new or difficult. Have your child choose the rewards that will be earned. Remember that the rewards do not need to be big or costly to work. Money is the least effective reward for many children.

Many small rewards work better than one big reward. Your child will be more successful if given the chance to earn small rewards everyday. As you start, reward a desired behavior every time it occurs. Then, over time, give the rewards less often.



## Tips to Remember:

- Pay attention to good behaviors.
- Involve your child by having him help choose rewards and by decorating sticker charts or penny jars.
- Start by rewarding desired behavior every time it happens.
- Be sure to praise your child when you reward her for good behavior.
- Over time, as behavior improves, you can give rewards less often.
- If these suggestions do not work, please talk with your pediatrician for more ideas.

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