



## Reward Systems

**Reward systems and praise can often make a positive difference to a child's behaviour by setting out clear rules and guidelines on how you expect your child to behave. Recognising and rewarding 'good' behaviour acts as an incentive to keep your child's motivation going and helps achieve the goal you're aiming for.**

In order to encourage a child to change their behaviour it is often necessary to provide a series of reward goals to aim for to keep them motivated and focused. Try to make the move towards change fun and obtainable, stay positive, give lots of praise and remain supportive.

Most children want to please and it is important to let them know when they have done well. Rewarding, if done sensibly and consistently, is an effective way of encouraging desired behaviour. Consistency will help encourage further progress towards the desired behaviour. Attention should be given for positive behaviour but as little attention as possible for negative behaviour.

Children and young people should always be rewarded for good positive behaviour. Rewards can be as simple as a big smile, a pat on the back or saying "well done", an increase in pocket money or an outing. Whatever reward method you use, it should be used to encourage and motivate the desired behaviour.

**There are lots of different types of reward systems but they all need to have a number of features in common to make them as effective as possible:**

### **Be clear and consistent**

- Be consistent with rewards. This means thinking carefully about what you want the reward system to achieve. When setting up the reward system explain what your expectations are clearly and simply to your child and let everyone involved in their care know so the system remains consistent.

### **Include your child**

- Let your child know what you expect and what behaviour they will be rewarded for. Reward systems should be simple and achievable, for younger children rewards should be immediate but older children can be involved in agreeing what they are rewarded for and can build up to a larger reward.

### **Be fair**

- For any reward system to be effective it should be fair. Explain what behaviour will be rewarded and don't be tempted to move the goal posts. You may wish to create a reminder of your expectations by writing the steps of the system on a piece of card and putting it on the toilet wall

or you can involve your child in drawing pictures of the process to be followed to achieve the reward. For example:



### **Monitor progress**

- Ongoing monitoring of how well the system is working, looking at patterns of positive or negative problems that occur and readjusting the system to make it more effective can help to keep the reward system fresh, relevant and effective.

### **Keep it affordable**

- In the interest of the family budget, inexpensive rewards or activities are often preferable. Children are often motivated by rewards that appeal to them and older children often like the challenge of building up to more significant rewards.

### **Make rewards achievable**

- If a reward system is too complicated or too difficult to achieve it won't work. If you are hoping to make significant changes you may need to break the movement towards the goal into smaller achievable steps.

### **Give lots of praise**

- Praise your child each time they achieve the goal you have set and keep the reward system fresh and full of fun to help motivate them to continue.

### **How do you encourage new, desired behaviour?**

Choose one or two behaviours you would like to change and choose a reward your child would enjoy and feel motivated by. Not all rewards need have a monetary value and can include for example, an extra bedtime story, delaying bedtime by half an hour, choosing a favourite meal or snack, extra special time spent with you or, for older children, earning points toward something special or a privilege.

The reward system you choose should be relevant for your child and will help you avoid power struggles, enabling you to stand back and let your child make a choice. It helps to develop daily routines and rituals around the desired behaviour; allow your child to be involved in setting up those routines and rituals whenever possible.

Younger children often don't have the same perception of time as older children and therefore instant rewards often work best. Older children can build up towards an agreed reward and teenagers can choose the rewards that will motivate them.

### **There are many different reward systems – here are a few ideas to get you started:**

#### **Star charts**

Star charts are most effective with younger children. There are many different versions of star charts available to download from the internet or to buy, but try to choose charts that are simple and easy to understand. Some charts can be written on and some use stickers which are added each time the desired behaviour is achieved. You could spend some time making a unique and personal star chart with your child.

For some children, after a while, star charts can become a bit stale and lose their attraction, so in order to keep the system fresh you could ring the changes with different styles of charts when it looks as if your child is beginning to lack motivation with the chart.

A star chart that includes something to aim for can be more interesting and motivating. For example, a snakes and ladders star chart in which the steps of the ladders are used for successes and the snakes are used for unacceptable behaviour. Rewards should be included along the way, perhaps for example, when your child reaches numbers 10, 20 or 30 and with a bigger reward available when they reach the end.

***ERIC has simple reward charts for potty training and bedwetting available to purchase from the webshop.***

### **Lucky dip bag**

- The lucky dip bag offers an instant reward and helps maintain interest as the child looks forward to the surprise of the next reward. Use a bag or a box that your child can't see through and add a variety of wrapped, small and inexpensive gifts such as small plastic toys, party favours, marbles, small coins, bubble pots and stickers. Each time the desired behaviour has been achieved your child can take one wrapped gift from the lucky dip bag. The lucky dip bag should be kept in the toilet area, out of your child's reach and only available when the desired behaviour has been achieved.

### **Reward jar**

This is a system that builds up to an agreed award. Add your child's name and the agreed reward to an appropriate size jar and choose what reward tokens you will use to fill the jar, for example, marbles, coins, pebbles or Lego. Each time your child achieves the desired behaviour a reward token is added to the jar. When the jar is full your child receives the agreed reward.

### **Jigsaw puzzle**

Cut a picture of an activity your child would like to do into a jigsaw puzzle. For younger children this may be only 4 or 5 pieces, but more pieces may be suitable for older children. Each time your child performs the desired behaviour they can add a piece to the puzzle. When the puzzle is complete they can do the activity on the picture. Examples of activities include: a trip to the park, playing football with you, watching a favourite dvd, a family trip to the swimming pool or cinema, playing a board game or special one to one time with you.

### **Easing off the reward system**

At first, you'll need to ensure your child receives a reward every time the desired behaviour is achieved as this helps to reinforce the behaviour.

When the desired behaviour has become part of your child's routine you can ease off by gradually giving the reward less frequently, then give praise for the desired behaviour, and finally just a smile.

Once you feel your child is ready, you can move on to the next positive behaviour.

***For more information about reward systems or children's behaviour contact the Family Lives Helpline 0808 800 2222***