

# Rewards

Help for parents to identify when to reward your child's behavior



## What Are Rewards?

A reward is something you give your child for doing something you want him or her to do. Rewards make your child more likely to show that same behavior in the future. At the same time rewards increase good behaviors, they can also help get rid of bad behaviors. A child who is busy trying to do good things will have less time to do bad things. When things aren't going well, rewards can often quickly increase the good behavior you see from your child. Rewards also help parents and children feel less angry and upset.

### Rewards Can Help Your Child Learn to:

Be on time	Be polite
Share	Do homework
Come home on time	Do chores
Remember important things	Go to bed on time

A reward doesn't have to cost money. It can be as simple as a smile, a hug, or a special treat like watching TV or playing a game with you. Rewards can be used with children as young as infants, but they can also be used with teenagers and even adults. The type of reward will depend on the age of the child. Choosing a reward that is important to your child will help motivate your child to work hard to earn it.

## Getting Ready

Pick a behavior you'd like to see more often. Make sure it's very specific, like "put these dirty clothes in the hamper."



**Here is a behavior I'd like to see more often:**

Make a list of rewards. Think of as many as you can. They don't have to be big or expensive. Some of the best rewards don't cost anything. For example, maybe your child would like to play a special game with you or to watch an extra TV program.



**Here is an example of a small reward my child would like:**

Decide how to keep track of the rewards your child earns. In many cases, you will just give the reward when you see the behavior. However, if the desired behaviors might occur often, you can start a chart with stickers for young children or a point system for older children. Then your child can build up points to be cashed in for a reward.



**Here is the way I would like to keep track of my contract with my child:**

Use an IF-THEN sentence to come up with a contract for what your child has to do to get the reward. For example, "If my child can clear his or her dishes from the table every night when dinner is over, then he or she can stay up for an extra 30 minutes on Saturday night" or "If my child brushes her teeth at night, then she gets..."



**Here is an example of an IF-THEN contract I can make with my child**

**IF:**

**THEN:**

## What to Do

- 1** **Make a list of rewards.** Pick rewards that are inexpensive or free, and can be given quickly and frequently if needed.

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- 2** **Make a list of behaviors.** These should be simple behaviors at first, and remember to spell out how the behaviors will connect with the rewards (either directly or through points or tokens).

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- 3** **Give the reward (or sticker or point) as soon as the good behavior happens.** The more quickly you respond to good behavior, the better the rewards will work. In the beginning, it is also OK to give rewards for behaviors that are only partly successful.

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- 4** **Little by little, increase the difficulty.** As your child gets better at doing the behavior you want, you can increase the demands. Something that used to earn 2 points might now earn 1. Just be careful not to raise the difficulty too quickly so your child doesn't become frustrated and lose interest.

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- 5** **Praise.** It is always a good idea to offer your child praise along with the rewards. Over time, praise will help your child develop a sense of accomplishment and pride in his or her good behavior. Make sure your praise is enthusiastic and labeled—that is, say what it is that you are praising the child for. For example, “Great job putting your clothes away, Rachel!”

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## Help! Rewards Aren't Working!

Problem:	Try This:
<p><b>I feel like I'm bribing my child.</b></p>	<p>For now, rewards can provide a boost to help your child learn how to behave. Eventually, your child will learn to behave well and work hard just because it makes him or her feel good. As this happens, the rewards can be made smaller.</p>
<p><b>My child is begging me for rewards.</b></p>	<p>Don't give in—that just rewards the begging. Remind your child how to earn the reward and give it only if you see the behavior.</p>
<p><b>There's nothing my child wants badly enough to work for.</b></p>	<p>You may already be giving your child everything he or she wants, even when he or she doesn't earn it. Think about all the fun toys or privileges your child has, and choose some to use strictly as rewards that must be earned.</p>
<p><b>My child doesn't follow through.</b></p>	<p>Make sure you give rewards only after your child has actually done what you've asked. Don't reward your child just for promising to do something later. For example, if you say, "You can watch TV now as long as you promise to clean your room when the show is over," your child may not do what he or she promised. When you talk about rewards with your child, you will find it helpful to use IF-THEN sentences.</p>
<p><b>My child is trying really hard, but rewards still aren't working.</b></p>	<p>There are three possible solutions: (1) Make sure you're not asking your child to do something that is just too hard. If necessary, consider breaking things down into smaller steps to help your child succeed. Give a reward for each of the smaller steps. (2) Make sure to give the reward right away, as soon as your child demonstrates the behavior you want. (3) Make sure you're using rewards that your child really likes.</p>
<p><b>Other people in my home aren't helping me.</b></p>	<p>Talk to your family about this at a time when things are calm. Explain that everyone has to work together and that your child will be more successful if all caregivers in the home use the reward program consistently.</p>