

# USING REWARDS WITH YOUR CHILD

July, 2021

## Overview

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Many parents try at one time or another to manage a child's behavior by providing rewards. The good news is that reward plans can work great. The bad news is that developing a good reward plan can be tricky. Many times when parents get frustrated with a reward plan it's because the plan wasn't developed quite right. If you're using rewards with your kids, check out the ideas below. If you'd like more information or help, ask your clinic's Internal Behavioral Health Consultant. Good luck!

## Suggestions for Effective Use of Rewards

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### BE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHAT BEHAVIORS EARN THE REWARD

Asking a child to "clean your room" to get a reward might cause problems because your idea of "clean" probably differs from your child's. Instead, you might say, "Putting away all of your clothes and making your bed" earns the reward. (You might also make the bed yourself once to show your child exactly what "making the bed" means.)

### ● DON'T TRY TO WORK ON TOO MANY BEHAVIORS AT ONCE

Select one or two behaviors that concern you the most and focus on these. Choose your battles carefully!

### ● INVOLVE YOUR CHILD IN CHOOSING REWARDS

Of course, you're the final authority on what rewards are possible, but ask your child for ideas. (S/He'll have plenty!) The key is to find rewards that your child gets excited about. Also think about what activities your child chooses to do during free time. Those activities will probably make great rewards. And remember, rewards don't have to cost money. Examples of rewards are:

- Choosing what is for dinner
- Staying up 15 minutes later than usual
- Having a friend over/going to a friend house
- Selecting a movie to watch
- Fifteen minutes of "special time" with Mom or Dad
- Time to play a video game
- Giving a monetary reward
- A smiley sticker (or some other sticker that s/he likes)
- Having Mom or Dad read to him or her 15 minutes

Discuss the above items with your child and together generate some additional items.

Primary Care Behavioral Health

# USING REWARDS WITH YOUR CHILD (CONT.)

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- **MAKE IT EASY FOR YOUR CHILD TO GET THE REWARD**

We want your child to get the reward, because that means s/he is behaving appropriately. Also, in order for the appropriate behavior to occur again it needs to be rewarded. Thus, make it easy for your child to earn a reward at the beginning. As his/her behavior improves, you may gradually make it harder to get a reward.

- **EXPLAIN THE PLAN TO YOUR CHILD**

Before starting, take a few minutes to sit down with your child and explain exactly what behaviors will be rewarded, what rewards are possible, and when the plan will start.

Your time will be well spent!

- **BE CONSISTENT**

Using rewards one day but not the next, or failing to give rewards that have been earned, will almost surely prevent the rewards from being successful. (Think of it this way...would you go to work every day and work hard if your employer only paid you some of the time?)

- **DEVELOP NEW REWARDS AS NEEDED**

Rewards often lose their power over time. This doesn't mean the plan stopped working, it simply means you might need to find some new rewards that will excite your child again.

- **REMEMBER TO PRAISE YOUR CHILD, TOO!**

Every time you give a reward, give lots of praise, too. Praise is a reward, and will also increase the posit