

Encouraging and Rewarding When Managing Behaviour

In implementing the School Wide Positive Behaviour Support Program teachers across the school have been more aware than ever of the power of praise. In fact, the aim is to use at least six positive comments to a negative one. No matter how old your children are, your praise and encouragement will help them feel good about themselves and in doing this, your relationship with them will strengthen. Rewards can also be a very useful motivator in bringing about a change to good behaviour.

Describing the behaviour which is pleasing, is best for boosting self esteem and encouraging more good behaviour. Rather than a "Well done", a child will get more out of a description such as, "I loved the way you left the park the first time you were asked" or for an older child, "You made a concerted effort and got home before the time we agreed, well done." Describing what you like is much more genuine and convincing than vague praise such as, "Good girl." Recognising and praising effort acknowledges how hard a child has tried and we can't ask them to put in more than maximum effort even if in the end the achievement falls below their goal. Catching kids being good and making comments encourages them to keep up the good work. A very powerful technique to encourage good behaviour is to talk to others about your child within earshot of the child! At the beginning praise the behaviour you are looking for every time you witness it and as it becomes routine, praise it less. See if you can give your child some words of encouragement every day remembering it takes a lot of praise to outweigh a criticism. Look for positive changes in confidence and self esteem.

Rewards can make your praise and encouragement more effective when you focus on a particular behaviour you would like to modify and change. Most behaviour is influenced by the consequences that follow it. Parenting positively relies on encouragement and reward rather than focussing heavily on punitive consequences. Bad behaviour is often more obvious and easier to notice than good behaviour, and there is a tendency to immediately move to a punishment (giving a negative consequence), so rather than punishing the poor behaviour, make it clear to your child what you expect and negotiate a mutually acceptable reward. When you reward behaviour which is difficult for a child to achieve and he/she understands what they need to do to achieve the change, few would disagree that the effort required deserves a reward. Once this new positive behaviour becomes routine a new behaviour can be focussed on for a reward. Surprising your child with a reward for general good behaviour is extremely encouraging as well. For example, "Thanks for helping to prepare the dinner. You can choose what we have for dessert."

A reward chart is a visual reminder of how well your child is going with their goals to improve behaviour. For them to be successful, parents need to be mindful of the age appropriateness of the number and types of tasks on the chart. Rewards should be frequent to begin with too. The likelihood of keeping a seven year old motivated if there are many, many tasks each day and the reward is a long way off is quite low. It may be pertinent to reward daily (and more often for under school age children) to begin with.

We believe the single best reward you can offer your child is one to one time with you! The rewards your child might like to work towards include a slightly later bedtime, a play date, a milkshake after school, screen time (kids should earn screen time rather than be given free reign up to a maximum of two hours per day according to the American Academy of Pediatrics), special activities such as park time, special craft, board game, an extra story at bedtime, choose a special meal and for teens earning phone credit, lifts, a shopping trip, a get out of a day of chores pass, movie pass or other outing, extra pocket money are a few ideas. Reward charts motivate children when they are clear on exactly what they need to do to succeed. Ask your child to explain what they need to do in order to achieve the reward.

Gai Bath and Andrea Maver
SMC Counsellors

gbath@smc.tas.edu.au

amaver@smc.tas.edu.au