

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

Rewarding rewards

Parents often say to me that they have tried sticker charts and they don't work. My experience is that they do but there are pitfalls to avoid, so how can we make sure that rewards are rewarding for parents and children? Here are some thoughts ...

Reward charts are great at changing behaviour or developing good habits. What do we want to achieve and how can we approach this positively? Focus on what we want rather than the negative behaviour we want to change. Rather than saying that we will give a sticker to a child who does their homework without throwing a tantrum, we can say we will reward our child if they comply with doing their homework at the agreed time.

We need to focus on changing one behaviour at a time and initially not the most extreme or challenging ones. The principle is to stretch our children a bit by using a sticker chart to develop a new habit but not to set the bar so high that they know they can't achieve what we are asking them to do. If children struggle to play nicely with their siblings for 15 minutes without fighting, it's neither fair nor achievable to expect them to "be good" for a whole hour in order to receive a reward. The goal is to set up reward programmes that motivate our children to be successful.

Children need to "buy in" to whatever system we develop whilst not bankrupting us in the process. Lots of children like to earn points that they can exchange for items or experiences that you have already discussed, like choosing what's for pudding, having a home movie night with popcorn, earning extra time on technology or a trip to the park. I know of a family who thought up some extra fun activities that the family could do together as rewards. For example, they made dens in the front room, which obviously you could do anytime but this was reserved as a reward and so had even more value. Younger children can't wait a long time to see their reward, in fact 4-5 year olds are often happy with just a sticker. Think about how quickly your child can earn their treat and whether you think they can wait that long. Again it's about stretching them but allowing them to succeed.



The "when then" principle is very effective. "When put your shoes and coat away, then you can have a snack" or "When you've tidied up the lego, then we can have a story". What is most important is that we see the behaviour we want **before** we give the reward. We also need to make sure we always offer lots of specific and labelled praise as well as any tangible reward. Cuddles and high fives are a really lovely physical way of letting our children know that we're pleased with their behaviour. Remember, children will do more of the behaviours that we notice, so if we focus on the good stuff, we should begin to see more of the good and less of the "bad".

A final note of caution, it's really important that we **don't** remove rewards that have been earned by our children. This can sometimes be really tempting, but we need to keep rewards separate from consequences. So, for example, if we reward children with an extra story at bedtime for good behaviour, it would be inappropriate to remove a story for behaviour we don't want. More on this when we look at consequences in a few weeks' time.

If you need to chat anything through, please email me at parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk.