

Catch them being good

Carley, aged eight, loves bouncing on the trampoline and playing with other children in the neighbourhood. When she comes home from school she has a quick snack and then goes out to play. She doesn't stop to put her school bag away, change her shoes or tidy up after her snack even though her mother, Sandy, tells Carley almost every day. It is so irritating. Sandy finds it difficult not to yell at Carley when she doesn't do what she is asked. Sandy has tried sending Carley to bed early for her disobedience, but all it seemed to achieve was an angry face and more dawdling at bed time.

Recently Sandy decided to try a different approach. She wrote a list of the things she wanted Carley to do after school, discussed it with her daughter, asked for her help, and put it on the fridge. Each night she made a point of ticking off the things Carley had done. She thanked and praised her for doing what she had been asked. Carley's father also told her how happy he was that she was doing things to help. Carley feels really proud to know her parents are so pleased with the things she can do to help at home.

Psychological research has shown that following up a person's behaviour with something positive makes it more likely that the behaviour will happen again. Praise and other kinds of acknowledgement are motivating, and are often needed to help children change their behaviour.

You can help children to learn positive behaviours by telling them clearly what you want and praising or rewarding them when they do it.

Sounds too easy?

What else might be needed?

- Is what you have asked the child to do clear enough? Saying, "I want you to pick up the clothes off the floor in your room before you go out to play," is clearer than saying, "I want you to tidy your room."
- Are you asking for behaviour that your child can do? Sometimes we ask children to do things that are too difficult for them without help.
- Are you asking them to do too many things at once?
- Do you find that you are getting angry with your child for things not done more often than praising his or her efforts?



Something to try during the week

Double the amount of praise you give your child for his or her efforts in the coming week. You may need to expand your own vocabulary so you have a variety of positive comments ready to encourage your child.

Catch your child being good

Keep a record of the behaviours you are pleased with. Reading them over together from time to time will be a positive experience for both you and your child.

You may ask, "Is praise enough to motivate my child?" Praise and acknowledgement work in most cases, but sometimes you may need to add an incentive plan with rewards to help change behaviour. If you do add an incentive plan, think carefully about your choice of reward. Incentive plans usually work best for a short period of time (eg a few weeks).

Ideas for a reward menu

- Play game with parent or carer
- Favourite (healthy) meal
- Stay up late
- Have a friend over
- Use sports equipment
- Use the computer



Tips for using rewards effectively

- Ask your child about what they like. If they suggest the reward, it will be more motivating.
- Make sure the reward is realistic for you to give.
- If the child becomes bored by use of the same reward, use a menu of 10 to 15 items to create variety. When your child meets his or her behaviour expectation, he or she selects one reward from the menu.
- A mystery reward is also very motivating for most children.
- If a child wants to earn a big reward (eg computer game, movie), you could use a token system. Each day he or she could earn tokens to be exchanged later for a bigger reward.
- Emphasise social rewards and privileges over material rewards. Material rewards (eg toys, money) are expensive and often don't work. Many children enjoy having time to spend with their parents or carers. Rewards involving time and activities with parents or carers can be reinforcing and promote good relationships at the same time.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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