

## Behavioural techniques

### Behavioural rewards techniques

Children and young people should always be rewarded for good positive behaviour. This can be as simple as giving them a smile, a pat on the back or saying "well done", or you could give them an increase in their pocket money or arrange a family/class/group outing. Whatever method is used, it should be used to encourage them. Attention should be given to them for something positive they have done. Negative behaviours should be given as little attention as possible. Rewarding, if done sensibly and consistently, is the best way of encouraging desired behaviour in a child or young person. Remember rewarding is not bribing.

### The importance of a positive approach

Most children want to please. It is therefore important to acknowledge that they are pleasing you. In other words, let them know they have done well. Be consistent in this. This will help to encourage further desired behaviours. You may want to use a behaviour chart to help with this so that the child can see how well he/she is doing. Working towards a reward is better than an immediate reward like giving them a sweet. The danger of instant rewarding is that once they have their reward, their behaviour may lapse until they receive their next reward. Remember rewards come in many forms for example, increased pocket money or increased time on their games console, but the best of all involves the whole family/class/group going on outings, possibly to the cinema or to a zoo or other favourite place. This will help increase their sense of being an important part of the family/class/group.

### Behaviour charts

Behaviour charts have been used in schools for many years, but are appropriate in lots of other settings including the home. They are best for children under twelve years of age, but a chart can be used with older young people as long as it is interesting enough in design and the young person is not embarrassed by it. The chart should be pinned to a wall, fridge or similar accessible place or it may be on a computer screen.

The most common chart used is the star chart. This is most appropriate for a younger child (aged 5 to 8). The drawback of the star chart is that it loses its attraction fairly quickly. A better method is one that has something to aim for, for example, a snakes and ladders board.

The ladders can be used for sustained success and the snakes can be used for particularly unacceptable behaviour. Rewards should be built in along the way, for example when the child reaches numbers 25, 50, 75 and with a big reward available when they reach the 100.

A popular chart for younger girls is one where they add spots to a ladybird and a popular chart for boys is one where they add carriages to a train or perhaps a stick-on rocket moving in steps towards the moon. It is important that whatever design is used, the child is involved in creating the chart themselves along with help from their parents/carers/workers. This helps them feel they have ownership of it. Equally, the decision whether to award a star or a further carriage should be a joint one between the child and their parents/carers/workers.

### How to make it work

- Don't make the steps towards their main goal too difficult. Keep the steps small and achievable.
- Don't allow too many 'stars' in a day as this can make the exercise unrewarding.
- The chart is meant to be a motivator so always ensure the emphasis is on rewarding the desired behaviours. Make sure that it does not become a punishment chart.
- Certain types of charts become stale, for example a star chart, so keep the system fresh. Use different ideas and different styles of chart. Ring the changes when it looks like the child is beginning to tire of their current chart.

Don't be too strict when deciding whether the child has achieved another star/carriage, etc. The child should be involved in this decision.

### Token reward systems

A token reward system is similar to a behaviour chart, except instead of marking the desired behaviour on a chart, the child or young person receives a token which they collect towards a meaningful reward. This is just the same as adults earning wages for their work. The employee can then spend the accumulated wages as they choose.

An example of the token reward system involves the use of pocket money. A positive example of this would be to start with a small guaranteed amount on a regular basis, for example, weekly. This amount would then be added to every time they achieve a small target. If they do not achieve their target then the amount would remain the same.

Pocket money is a great motivator for most young people, but it can have drawbacks if money is tight and it does not allow for more creative rewards like a trip to the beach, a favourite meal or having friends for a sleepover. Creating your own tokens rather than just using money does introduce more opportunities for different types of reward and for the young person to negotiate their rewards.

### Steps for creating a token system

Decide with the young person what you are going to use for the tokens. Raffle tickets are ideal because they are cheap and easy to get and they cannot be counterfeited.

- Decide what behaviours throughout the week will be rewarded and how many tokens each behaviour will be worth.
- Negotiate with the young person what rewards they would like to spend their tokens on and how much each will cost. A big reward like a sleepover with friends or a trip to the museum will cost more than getting to choose the evening meal or an extra ten minutes playtime at school.
- Write down your agreement so that there is no confusion and give a copy to the young person.
- When they achieve a desired behaviour like finishing a task or staying calm for an agreed period, give them their tokens there and then.

- When they have collected enough tokens they can buy their reward. If this is something they will have to wait for like a trip, give them a written credit note promising the reward at a mutually agreed time in the future.

Any token reward system should be set out in a positive way. It should not be used as a means to punish. If a punishment is required, keep it separate from the token system. A negative example of this token reward system would be to start with their maximum amount and each time they misbehave they would lose part of that amount with, of course, the possibility that the child would end up with nothing. The result of the negative approach is that it creates resentment and any impetus gained is likely to be lost.

### How to make it work

- Don't use this method as a punishment.
- Use it as a means of affirming positive behaviour.
- If the token reward system is done in a negative way it could make the child resentful.
- Don't make the targets too difficult or the rewards so expensive that it takes too long to get them.

### Penalties

Setting limits/boundaries for a child/young person is clearly a good thing, but all children will try to test these limits. Sometimes they will behave in a manner that is totally unacceptable. It is important to have penalties you can use at those times. For example not letting a child go out to play, not letting them watch tv or use the computer or other activities that they enjoy for a short period of time.

'Time-out' is an effective penalty for younger children which involves removing the child from the group or family to sit quietly on their own, for example on the stairs or hallway for a specified period of time. It should not be anywhere frightening like a dark cupboard or hallway. Nor should it be in a potentially dangerous place for a small child like the kitchen or bathroom. Avoid places where the child can amuse themselves easily like their bedroom or play area. The length of time should be roughly a minute for every year of the child's life. In other words, if the child is aged 5 then the time out should be approximately five minutes. It is important to be aware of the child's safety during this period.

These penalties should be viewed as an opportunity to learn how to behave well, not as a means of punishment. They should be consistently enforced and they should be seen as being fair, in other words they should 'fit the crime'. The opportunity for a second chance to behave in an appropriate manner should be available to the child. For example if they have refused to pick up their toys they should be given a short penalty then allowed the chance to pick them up again. Being sent to their room for the remainder of the day or grounded for a week does not encourage a child to do as they have been asked.

### How to make it work

- Be realistic about how much a child will conform to your expectations (for example, don't expect teenagers to keep their bedrooms tidy – this is their opportunity to express their independence).
- Don't be too harsh in deciding on the severity of the penalty, for example, being sent to bed for the rest of the day or grounded for an entire week.

- It is important to see the penalty through to the end, i.e. don't end the 'time-out' period before it is due to end.
- Be consistent in applying penalties.