



REWARD SYSTEMS

What is a reward system?

Reward systems are a tool that can be utilised to assist in increasing a child's motivation towards a goal. Reward systems aim to encourage positive behaviour change by motivating a child to practice the skills associated with the goal. Self motivation can be challenging for children especially when they can't see the 'payoff' at the end. Having a special goal to work towards is often the best motivator.

What types of reward systems are there?

- Sticker/stamp chart: This is a simple system that can be used when working towards a particular goal.
- Token economy systems: This system involves collecting tokens to build up to short and long term goals/rewards. The tokens are collected and later exchanged for a meaningful object or privilege e.g. short term reward of ice cream and long term reward of new Lego. This system can be modified to suit different family circumstances and goals.

Why are reward systems important?

Reward systems are important as they teach children to be responsible for their actions, gives them a sense of achievement and provides recognition for effort the child has demonstrated.

A reward system could be used to support activities such as:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-care skills (showering, toileting, dressing, eating) | <input type="checkbox"/> Executive functioning (organisation, paying attention, time management, task initiation) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Routine development | <input type="checkbox"/> Social skills (listening, taking turns, listen) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic skill development (cleaning, cooking) | <input type="checkbox"/> Reinforcing positive behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School work/homework | <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement in therapies (OT, speech, psych sessions) |

The next page includes Information on how to Implement a reward system.

Implementing a reward system

Getting started:

It is useful to use your child's interests as a motivator/reward this will increase engagement and participation. The most important aspect of reward system is to provide positive reinforcement through the use of encouraging comments and praise.

Rewards do not have to be costly items or outings, they can be creative! Some examples include:

- Extra time on technology
- Choosing dinner or dessert
- A small toy (Lego)
- A special activity (Zoo, beach)
- Later bed time
- Spending more time with friends (sleepover, play date)

Please note: NEVER use a child's special interest as a punishment. If you take away their special interest and use it as a punishment it rarely works as a behaviour modification method and could result in escalating behaviours. It is better to use as a reward, e.g. 'when you have achieved X, you can have Y'.

Grading:

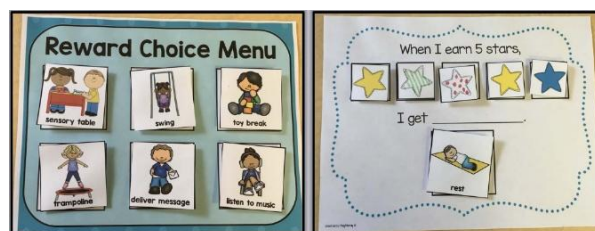
It can be helpful to break up the goal into smaller and more achievable steps to motivate the child to remain engaged. The difficulty will slowly be increased over time as the child progresses with the goal. Example: for one week the child spends 1 hour laying in bed at bed time and receives a reward, next week the child sleeps in own bed for 2 hours and receives a reward etc. As the child progresses you can increase the difficulty of the goal until the child is able to sleep in their own bed the entire night.

Timing:

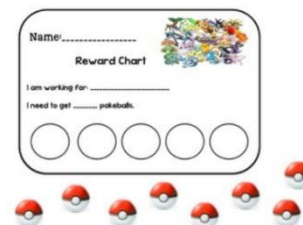
Rewarding the behaviour straight away or having a scheduled time of day to reflect on goal achievement is most effective. This will ensure the child learns to associate the behaviour with the reward. It can also be when the parents provide acknowledgment for the achievements the child has accomplished.

Phase out:

Once the child is able to complete the goal/task the reward system may phase out on its own as the child will feel a sense of achievement for completing the task rather than relying on the reward. If this does not occur, you can use grading methods to slowly phase out the reward by increasing the time between rewards. Example: daily reward, weekly reward, monthly reward etc. You could also choose another goal/behaviour to work on using the reward system.



Common issues with implementing a reward system



If your child doesn't care if they earn stickers/tokens:

- Have your child involved in picking out the rewards they would like to earn. Be open to a discussion about how many stickers/tokens should be required for various rewards.
- If they think it's too hard to earn rewards, they'll lose motivation. Keep some simple rewards on the menu that only require a couple of tokens and remember that rewards don't have to cost money.
- Be creative! Use their interests and think of alternative ways (doesn't have to be a token or sticker) that they can earn the reward.
- Some websites offer personalised reward charts - you can try googling these to find a suitable and motivating chart for your child.
- You lose track of how many tokens they have earned - Put the tokens in a jar, keep a sticker chart in a common space, reward behaviour straight away so you do not forget.

If your child gets upset when they don't earn any tokens:

- Remind them that they can try again next time. Tell them you hope they earn their next token soon. Praise them when they handle their frustration well. You can also review the number of stickers/tokens they need to collect as this amount may not be achievable - you could then lower the amount to begin with.

If a token system isn't fair to your other children:

- If you have more than one child, you might want to consider giving all of them the chance to earn tokens. Each child can have different behavioural goals and there should be items on the reward menu that interest each of them.
- Some parents use healthy competition to motivate siblings. For example, tell your children once everyone has earned 20 tokens, the family will go to the movies. This can encourage them to cheer one another on as they work toward a reward

If you are noticing increased negative behaviours after implementing the reward system:

- A change in expectation will initially result in an increase in behaviours. However, as the child adjusts to the new expectation this will decrease. This process can take anywhere from a few days to a few months. Persistence is key.

For more information and to find out how Geronimo can support you to implement a reward system please visit www.geronimo-ot.com.au

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