

Using Behavior Charts with Children

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Behavior charts are a useful tool for increasing a child's positive behavior. They are not to be used as a punishment for bad behavior. Research has shown that rewards for good behavior are more effective for improving child behavior than is punishment for bad behavior. The following are some guidelines for using behavior charts with your child.

- First, decide what behaviors you want your child to increase. Talk with your child about why you want these behaviors to increase. Ask your child what he or she wants to work on. Then write these behaviors down. List no more than 3 or 4 behaviors to start. Be sure to include some behaviors you know your child will succeed at so he will definitely be rewarded. Add a more challenging behavior, but keep expectations realistic.
- Next, explain the chart system to your child. Tell her that each day she will be able to win a star or other sticker on the chart if she completes the listed behaviors. Set up a contingency. For instance when she wins say 7 stars she can "buy" a privilege (such as an hour of Game Boy time) or item (such as an ice cream or meal out). Make the reward motivating. Parents should never offer a reward that they may not be able to deliver (such as a trip to Disneyworld for good grades).
- Some children do not understand star charts. They cannot relate the good behavior on Monday to the treat on Saturday. For these children it is better to try a more immediate reward such as stringing beads on a necklace or putting pennies or poker chips in a jar right after the child has done something on the list. Talk to the child about what the full jar represents (good work).
- For either of the above systems, it is important to review the chart each day. Praise the child for his efforts. Refrain from talking about what he did not earn. This is a process of accentuating the positive!
- As the child becomes accustomed to engaging in the desired behavior, parents should gradually withdraw the stickers and continue to verbally praise the child for doing the task or engaging in the behavior.
- It is important that the child realize that the sticker chart is to "jump start" the behavior. They should understand that that eventually they will be expected to do the behavior without rewards.
- Keep the chart updated and motivating. If there is a behavior on the chart that the child is never successful at, it should be removed from the chart. Rewards may need to be updated periodically.