Session 7

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT & STICKER CHARTS

Positive reinforcement is about catching your child being good! It is the most effective way to **teach children to repeat behaviors** we want to see more.

When you praise or give positive attention for a specific behavior, children learn that this type of behavior is important to you, and they are more likely to repeat that behavior. Praise helps children work hard to learn new skills and keep trying even when they are frustrated. Children who are praised for effort learn to encourage themselves to work hard.

A sticker chart is a specific way to give positive reinforcement. Using a sticker chart, you can list behaviors that you want your child to do more often, and give stickers when they do those behaviors.





When you were a child, how often were you praised by adults in your family? How did you feel when you were praised (or not)?

How does this affect how you think about positive reinforcement and praise with your children?

LEARN



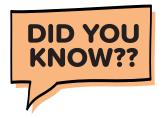
There are three types of positive reinforcement.

- **Praise:** any expression of approval. Praise can teach persistence. Praising children for not giving up encourages them to work through challenging tasks so that, when they are successful, they learn that effort can lead to success. Examples: smiles, high-fives, saying "Great job!" or "Wow, you did it!"
- **Privileges:** an activity or opportunity that your child doesn't always have -something special that your child will get excited about. **Examples:** going to the park together, or an extra story at bedtime.
- Material rewards: anything your child can see or hold, and gets excited about. **Examples:** stickers or small toys.

With all types of positive reinforcement it is important to understand the difference between a reward and a bribe.

- Rewards are given AFTER the desired behavior. ("When you clean up your toys, then you can watch that episode."). This motivates children to do what is expected.
- Bribes come BEFORE the desired behavior. ("Well, okay, but if I let you watch now, you have to clean up your toys after!"). With bribes, parents can lose the power to motivate.

It is important to decide what good behaviors you want to see more of, and reward your child when you see these behaviors. Focus on new skills and effort (rather than qualities like being smart).



- When children are first learning new behaviors, they need to be reinforced every time they do them. You can help make this connection when you praise by adding "WOW! That is something to be proud of!" or "I bet that feels really good!" Gradually, children develop intrinsic (or internal) motivation to behave well. Over time, you don't need to "catch" them every time with praise and stickers.
- It is best not to use food as a reward for good behavior. Giving sweet treats as rewards may teach children to eat even when they are not hungry. It can also be confusing for children. Food is not something that children should have to earn. We want children to trust that they will be fed no matter how they behave.





Young children learn best when they are told exactly what behaviors their caregivers would like to see. They are motivated to work hard when they know they will earn stickers and praise. Sticker charts make it fun because they can see their progress.

Create a sticker chart! You can use a printed sticker chart or simply a piece of paper.

- Choose three behaviors. Include at least one behavior that your child does well, and at least one behavior that is new or difficult.
- Write the behaviors on the chart. The behaviors should be specific, positive (tell your child what to do instead of what not to do), and easy to observe, so it is clear when the child has done the behavior and earned a sticker.

Instead of: "Be safe on the street."

Say: "Hold hands until we are safely at the park."

- > Use visuals, so if you put 'brush teeth' on the chart, draw (or cut from a magazine) a picture of a toothbrush. Invite your child to decorate the chart with you.
- Be consistent. Every time your child does something on the chart, give specific praise and a sticker!
- Don't remove any earned stickers. Removing earned stickers (or threatening to do so) can discourage children from continuing to work hard for their stickers.
- Review your child's progress every night as part of your routine. This is an opportunity to praise their progress and encourage them to keep working hard.
- Remember that it takes time for children to master new behaviors.
- After you have used a sticker chart for two weeks or more, you may want to add a "rewards menu" to keep your child motivated. A rewards menu shows a child what they can earn for a certain number of stickers. **Example:** two stickers = extra story at bedtime, five stickers = movie night.

Charts work very well for steps in a routine or other responsibilities, like setting the table, making your bed, or putting away your backpack. You can also include social and emotional skills, like using words to express feelings.

Here is an example of a sticker chart!

Name: Maite					
BEHAVIOR	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI
Make your bed	*	*		*	
Take a breath when you're upset			*		*
Help your sister put away toys	*				

Sticker Chart

What three behaviors will you include in a sticker chart for your child?



If you had your own sticker chart:

What behavior or skill would you include that you are doing really well?

(2) Which behavior or skill are you still working on?

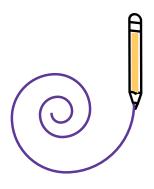
What would your own reward menu include?

During times of high stress, you may have less patience and less capacity to positively reinforce. And, children under stress are more likely to "act out." It is important to be kind to yourself, name what you are doing well, recognize your limits, and just do your best!



Complete this sentence...

One praise I love to hear is



Express yourself.
Write. Draw.
This book is yours!