

If you're **GOOD...**

A positive approach can tackle challenging behaviours – the trick is to offer children the right rewards, says **Adele Devine...**



We all like rewards, whether it's a simple "Well done", a "Thank you" or even (if we're being really spoiled) a bunch of flowers.

Working for rewards motivates and provides structure. I once saw a little boy raise his hand to his mum, but he hesitated and stopped himself, deciding not to hit. Mum was about to tell him off because he had raised his hand, but I quickly praised him. The boy had controlled his hitting instinct – this was huge progress.

It is important to address unwanted behaviours one at a time. Don't mention unwanted behaviours by saying things like "no hitting", but instead praise the child in question for having "kind hands".

CASE STUDY

'What a difference a snack makes' (Billy – Age 4, Diagnosis: ADHD)

Billy's mum was at breaking point! If he had 100 per cent adult focus he could be an angel, but without it he would tear through the house.

We created a chart to use between home and nursery. Billy got a sticker for every hour that he managed to 'be good'. We decided to focus first on him controlling physical behaviours such as hitting. The charts were kept in view at all times, and we tried to ensure that Billy got his stickers. Billy seemed very motivated by the sticker system.

The hourly stickers were transferred to a weekly chart to highlight time patterns when behaviour went off track. Billy would often miss the 11am sticker. We started to introduce a snack at 10:30am to see if the behaviour was hunger related. The weekly chart revealed that a snack made a huge difference.

Billy loved his stickers, but as with many reward systems we needed to stay a step ahead to retain motivation. We created a mini 'shop' so that Billy could trade his perfect chart for a prize at the end of each day. The prizes were mini dinosaurs and cars bought at the pound shop and wrapped in tin foil (to save time). Some might say a

FREE RESOURCES

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ABC CHARTS CAN BE USED FOR MORE DETAILED BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS. BY CHARTING THE ANTECEDENT (WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE THE BEHAVIOUR), BEHAVIOUR AND CONSEQUENCE, TRIGGERS AND PATTERNS MAY EMERGE. THESE ARE ALSO AVAILABLE TO PRINT FREE ONLINE AT OWL.LY/OTXIT

system like this could spoil the child, but what it did was teach Billy to control his behaviour. In time the rewards were unnecessary, and we all knew that if Billy had a rumbling tummy we had best fill the gap before the 'Billyraptor' emerged...

CASE STUDY

'Creating positives' (Barney - Age 5, Diagnosis: Autism)

Barney's behaviour had become so explosive that he was often taught in a separate room. When he was with other children, he always found a way to mix things up...

For example, at the sand tray he would start off well, but within a minute a handful of sand would be thrown in another child's face. He moved chairs as other children went to sit. Papers were scattered, paintings defaced, junk models squashed and drawings ripped up. He had an ability to create absolute havoc in seconds and seemed to enjoy watching the aftermath.

But being taught in a separate room was not going to help Barney long term. He needed to learn to control

these urges and join the group. I examined the visual supports in place. In his individual room there was a sign that explained all the unwanted behaviours. There was a long list of 'no throwing', 'no kicking', 'no spitting', etc. for Barney to look at when he was in his separate room. There was nothing positive about these signs. Seeing these negatives each day was more likely to encourage 'expected' behaviours and remind him of them, so I removed this visual.

To replace it, we took photographs of all the good things Barney could do - from sharing a tricycle at playtime and waiting for his snack, to turn-taking on the computer, listening to a story and sitting nicely. We created a really positive visual that Barney enjoyed sharing with staff. Time and again he received praise for these past achievements. I heard staff saying "What good turn-taking Barney," whilst looking at the visual, and saw Barney beam in response. These comments were the rays of sunshine he needed. The dark cloud of negatives shifted, and sharing all the things he could do so well helped paint a positive self-image.

We also introduced token boards with rewards during sessions. Barney would select a motivating reward and place it on his board. Once he had five tokens he

10 TOKEN TIPS

HOW TO TURN REWARDS INTO POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR...

- 1 Motivate the individual** - if the child likes a character, colour or topic, use it to style the token board.
- 2 Set them up to succeed** - we must judge how long we can stretch out between tokens by the child's ability to wait for a reward.
- 3 Be positive** - be over-the-top enthusiastic when the child gets each token; let them know you are really happy with them.
- 4 Be consistent** - if it's working at nursery, share the system with home.
- 5 Have a reward board** - this way the child can select their individual reward.
- 6 Reinforce learning** - token boards can be a great way to teach concepts such as time or money.
- 7 Share their success** - let them see you telling other people how happy you are when they succeed.
- 8 Take control** - children like to know adults are in control; it makes them feel safe. Don't allow them to take control of getting tokens and rewarding themselves.
- 9 Look for patterns and adapt** - are certain times of the day more challenging? Are there any possible triggers such as hunger, noise or lack of attention?
- 10 Keep it fresh** - a token system using stickers might lose its magic after a few weeks. Be ready to up the ante and make the rewards more exciting, or get creative with a whole new system.



could have his reward. This could be time on the computer or holding a guinea pig. At first our expectation was that Barney would stay on track for 10 minutes earning tokens, to get his reward. Over time we stretched this out. Turning negatives into positives helped Barney realise he could have more fun without mixing things up.

Final thoughts

Don't worry that using rewards will spoil the child. Children learn to control their behaviour in stages; help them to manage this and in time you can reduce rewards. Highlight when a child succeeds and they will surprise themselves with their ability to stay on track.



about the author

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