

Increasing Desirable Behavior

Attend to What You Want to See

- Provide specific praise for it, i.e. NOT “good job” but rather “Those figures in the diorama look really life-like. I love all the little details you added!”
- Children crave parental attention, so pay attention to every small step in the right direction
- Ignore setbacks: attending to them is just negative attention, and so will increase the chances of the setback being repeated
- Nagging doesn’t work: it’s just more negative attention for NOT doing what you are supposed to

Reward What You Want to See

- Don’t be afraid to use rewards: a “bribe” is an inducement provided ahead of time to coerce a child into doing a behavior; a reward is compensation provided after a job well-done (e.g., your paycheck is a reward, not a bribe)
- Use natural rewards whenever possible (e.g., When you eat your vegetables, then you get dessert; When you finish your homework, then you get to play your video games; When you straighten your room, then you get to go out with your friends)
- For behaviors that the child needs to improve upon, you may need to create a more formal reward system (i.e., point chart), but most children can only work on 1 or 2 behaviors at a time
- Everyone can improve on something, so if one sibling has a reward system for a particular behavior, make sure the others have systems for different behaviors (reduces sibling rivalry)
- Young children have a very short perspective of time, so the more immediate the reward the more meaningful it will be to a young child
- Visually showing progress on a sticker chart is often encouraging for young children, even if the reward they are working towards is not so big
- Effective rewards don’t always cost big bucks: time spent doing a favorite activity with you is one of the most effective rewards of all; teens sometimes like to earn an extra privilege

Variations

- Make it easier: break difficult or big tasks into small chunks, and praise the completion of each little chunk (e.g., for school assignments; for approaching a feared situation if anxious*)
- Encourage if child is intimidated by the task: “I know this seems hard, but you can do it!”
- Some children respond to the kitchen timer challenge: “Let’s see how many questions you can finish in 5 minutes” or “Let’s see if we can clean up before the timer goes off”, especially if followed by praise or reward for task completion
- Having a small penalty for NOT doing the task is sometimes needed for routine chores (e.g., reducing allowance; brief time out if not done after 2 reminders)
- Rehearse tasks that the child may have difficulty doing independently (e.g., conversation starters for the socially anxious)
- Perfectionists sometimes get worse with charting, so use informal rewards for these children

**Also see “Keys to Parenting Your Anxious Child” on Books page*

