

Promoting Learning and Positive Behaviour at Home

Using Reward Systems for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 3



This resource is part of a series of seven booklets on Promoting Learning and Positive Behaviour in the Home developed by the NCSE Behaviour Practitioner team. The series is for parents of children and young people with additional needs.

Contents

Using rewards systems at home	1
What motivates your child?	1
Steps to select your child's rewards	2
Using a token economy system at home	3
Steps for creating token economy systems	4
Top Tips!	5
Helpful links	5
Video samples	5
References	5

Booklets in the series

Resource 1: Behaviour Support Pack for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 2: Home Routines for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 3: Using Reward Systems for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 4: Behaviour Contracts for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 5: A Total Communication System for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 6: Life Skills for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 7: Transitioning for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Using Rewards Systems at Home

What Motivates Your Child?

Everybody has needs, desires and wants that motivate them. For children and young people it may be the need or desire for the attention of a parent or someone close to them, a need to be heard and listened to, to be part of an action happening in the family or peer group or to remove themselves from a sound, texture, light that they find uncomfortable. It can also be immediate access to an iPad, TV programme or game.

Motivation (needs, desires, wants) generally come before an action or behaviour, rewards (recognition of effort and achievement) come after and both are often, but not always linked to one another. For example, children and young people can sometimes love to learn a new skill without seeking a reward.

Rewards and reward systems are often used by teachers to support their children in the classroom. Rewards provide an incentive to children to learn, behave and achieve. For example, when a child makes a good effort, teachers give them a star or when a child's behaviour improves, they earn extra golden time.

At home, rewards can also be used to support your child's behaviour. Every child and young person has particular things they like to do or have access to as a reward. These can be used to develop positive behaviour and learn new skills or strengthen current skills. These rewards might be toys or favourite activities, stickers or praise, electronics or games and so on. To help you use these rewards, you need to first find out what they are and then use them consistently in a reward system.



Steps to selecting your child's rewards

1. Make a list of all of the things that your child likes. These will be his/her rewards. If your child has the skills, you can ask him/her to join in with making the list.
2. Highlight some items on this list that your child can earn. Make sure some other items on the list are freely available for your child.
3. On this list, select the items that your child likes the best.
4. These items might be used to work on a skill that your child might need help with (e.g., getting dressed) or for something you want them to do more often, like cleaning up. Refer to the booklet on Life Skills for Children and Young People with Additional Needs.

Now that you or you and your child have selected what your child likes, you can use this information to develop a reward system. For example, you can catch good behaviour and reward it straight way. The likelihood is that you will see more of this behaviour. This is a very positive way to support your child's behaviour at home. Rewards can also be used as part of a token system that we call a token economy.



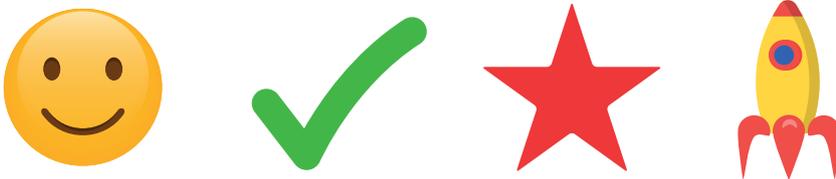
Using a token economy system at home

A token economy is a positive behaviour reinforcement/reward strategy for establishing and maintaining positive behaviour. The strategy uses rewards to motivate children and young people to behave appropriately in a given situation and to maintain that behaviour. It is important to target behaviours you want to see more of, for example listening and following instructions at home. For some children and young people, targeting a single behaviour may be more appropriate.



To understand what a token economy is, it is a good idea to think of collecting stamps or points for a free coffee at your local coffee shop – once your card is full you get a free coffee. We all use token economies!

A token economy involves your child collecting tokens for good behaviour (e.g., following the rules at home, putting away their breakfast/lunch items, completing a piece of work, following instructions for an activity, using their communication system/device). Once they have collected a certain number, they can then 'cash them in' for an agreed reward (e.g., iPad, TV, free time, etc.).



The tokens can be stars, stickers, points, ticks or any symbol that has meaning for your child. See some examples above of tokens that you can use.



This is an example of a token economy for a 4 year old child. The tokens do not have to be printed out, you can use pen and paper!

Steps for creating token economy systems:

1. Decide on the skill/behaviour that your child needs to learn or follow.
2. What does your child need to do to get a token?
3. Select the type of token that is appropriate for the age and ability of your child.
4. Make a token board from whatever you have available to you at home.
5. Create the number of spaces on the token board where the tokens will go. This can be a number that meets your child's needs.
6. Have your child place a picture or write the word of the reward on the token board. You can use the reward list you made earlier.
7. Each time you see the chosen good behaviour or skill, give him or her a token.
8. Once the board is full, your child should always get the chosen reward.
9. Start the process again.

It is a good idea to use token economies throughout the day. If your child is doing well, why not use it for even more skills/behaviours! Refer to the booklet on Home Routines for Children and Young People with Additional Needs.



Top Tips!

- Be consistent.
- A reward should only be given for true effort.
- Make sure your child is getting enough rewards.
- Vary your child's rewards.
- Introduce something new if your child is losing interest.
- Keep favourite things out of reach.
- Set a timer for activity-based rewards. Agree the time. Stick to the time.
- Try to make sure that the amount of the reward is realistic.
- New and difficult tasks should have special rewards.
- **Always** find out what your child wants. Do not give them what you want to give them. They need to be motivated.
- Do not give your child too much work or make the work too difficult.
- Make sure your child has some surprises during the day as well. It is important that children do not have to earn 'all' nice things.
- Never promise something that is not available.



Video samples:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xDr2tPJCUY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvpLpt39c2A>

Helpful links:

- <https://www.twinkl.ie/>
- <https://www.verywellfamily.com/positive-reinforcement-child-behavior-1094889>
- <https://www.abaresources.com/free2/>

References:

- <https://www.twinkl.ie/>
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE) (2015), Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Schools – NCSE Policy Advice Paper No. 5. Accessed at https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/1_NCSE-Supporting-Students-ASD-Schools.pdf
- Hackenberg, T. D., (2009). Token reinforcement: Review and Analysis. Journal of Experimental Analysis of Behavior 91, 257–286.
- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Challenging%20Behaviors%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>

