

Positive Parenting Skills

Parenting as a Skill

Parents are made, not born! Learning how to deal effectively with another human being (either adult or child) is a skill-specific exercise in communication. Parents are often confronted with limitations in their skills as children mature and begin to test limits. It is natural to want to meet one's own needs and it may be difficult to get others to delay meeting those needs for the sake of family harmony. This program is designed to assist families in (1) learning more about effective communication skills, (2) how to apply those skills in developing a structured reinforcement program with (3) use across a broad spectrum of different settings both within and outside the home.

Communication Skill Training

People have ears but they do not hear, they have eyes but they do not see! Corporations in America spend millions of dollars each year on educational programs designed to teach and improve communication skills. Being able to understand and to seek clarification as needed is an essential ingredient to successful living in today's complex society.

Active listening requires that you provide feedback to the other person by offering *paraphrased* comment concerning what you heard them say. It requires that you slow your thought process down and that you process the information more thoroughly. Concentrating on what the other person has said is important to achieving an understanding of what is being considered.

Body language may represent as much as 75% of the message we send to other people. You will be asked to examine how you posture and position in the course of family conflict as well as in celebrating successes. Knowing what the body is saying is another part of how we communicate.

Token Economy Development

The term "token economy" developed out of research in the 1960s with autistic children. These children, born with a genetic defect which left them largely unaware of the world around them, displayed significant behavioral problems.

They would engage in repetitive head banging and other self-injurious behavior. In attempting to gain control over this behavior researchers developed a behavior specific approach using the principles of reinforcement. Using simple M & M candies the child was trained to extinguish the inappropriate behavior and increase the appropriate behavior. A graduated method of reinforcement dramatically increased these children's ability to function and be responsive.

You will be asked to develop a program for your child which consists of several specific components. These include (1) the behaviors you wish for him/her to engage in (2) the rewards he/she desires and (3) a tracking system for these two parts.

First you will need to set down with your child/teenager and identify what are the activities or items which they would like to possess or engage in. For example, a elementary child might enjoy staying up past the assigned bedtime, or being allowed to chose the television show. A teenager might enjoy renting a videogame or going out with friends. These activities should include not only special events such as going to the movies or weekend trips but also the everyday actions such as watching television and telephone use. It is important that this goal be achieved in cooperation with your child/teenager.

Second, you will need to identify what are the behaviors you would like to encourage with your child/teenager. Cleaning up his/her room, taking out the trash, completing homework assignments without repeated conflict are examples of typical "target behaviors".

Then, in cooperation with your counselor you will assign relative weights (either "tokens" or "points") for each activity. The goal is to offer the highest payoff for those activities which are most desired so that the child/teenager is most responsive to completing of those particular behaviors. Let the child know that "bonus" chips or points are available for the quick compliance with a request. You should give these chips out when the child has responded in a particularly helpful manner or is pleasant in interaction toward completion of the task. Typically you will use poker chips for preschool and elementary school age children while you would use abstract "points" for your teenager.

Assign a relative value to each chip so that you have denominations. A white chip might be worth one (1) while a blue is worth five (5) and a red worth ten (10). Keep the chips in a secure location that is not accessible by the child. Help your

child to make a bank for their chips so that they can feel involved in the experiment.

As these relative weights are assigned you will then develop a "Daily Tracking Sheet" which consists of a single page listing the assignments completed and the activities engaged in. Much like an accounting sheet this form enables you to track the relative effectiveness of the program. An example sheet is attached for your review.

Several points should be kept in mind as you beginning working with this program.

Number 1: The language of the program must be behavioral in description. This means that your conversations with the child/teenager should be focused on measurable, observable behaviors. "Cleaning up your room" is unclear in meaning while "clothes in cabinet, dirty clothes in hamper, dishes to kitchen and sheets straight on bed" is behavioral specific. The activities should be described sufficiently so that someone not present could perform them.

Number 2: The "cinderella" effect is critical to avoid hoarding of points/tokens. Remember what happened at the stroke of midnight to cinderella. For the purpose of this program you should remind your child/teenager that all points/tokens collected through the week are returned to the bank on Sunday (or whatever day you chose). This avoids the excessive accumulation of points with the child.

Number 3: In order to encourage daily savings of points/token the amount spent for normal activities should leave approximately 25% of the potential points earnable through the day. Remember you are assisting your child to understand the nature of our society and teaching him/her the value of saving is important. If you find that they regularly spend all of their points/tokens then you may want to increase the relative weights for activities by either reducing their cost or increasing they payoff.

Number 4: In order to encourage performance of daily minimums you can establish a baseline of what is the minimum amounts of points the child should obtain in a day. If the child is able to achieve or exceed that daily minimum then he/she is rewarded by discounted activity costs on the weekend. For example, say a child must earn at least 75 out of a possible 100 points a day. If they achieve this Monday through Friday then activities which normally cost 25 points would only

cost 10 or 15 points on Saturday or Sunday. A "frequent flyer" program to reward effort if you will.

Number 5: If other children are in the house you will most likely need to establish a behavioral program for each of them. Otherwise the one child may feel singled out. This also takes advantage of the natural competition between siblings. However be aware of the need to establish unique programs for each child.

Number 6: Points/tokens are not taken away during the first part of the program. It has been observed that if you "catch kids being bad" you often have bad kids with the reverse ("catch kids being good") being also true. Although the program will develop into extracting a cost for inappropriate behavior through a reduction in points or payment of tokens it is important that you start off with a positive approach. It is not uncommon that starting with such an approach often is sufficient so that negative reinforcement is not necessary.

Number 7: It is critical that you have reinforcement available both in an immediate as well as delayed form. This is particular true for younger children who may have little concept of time. You need to reward appropriate behavior as soon as you can, in some cases immediately. Don't simply give the child a token for good behavior but rather specifically point out what they did and why they are receiving the token.

Number 8: Pay attention to your child. It is not uncommon that the child gets no reward for appropriate behavior and may need to misbehave to get the attention of a parent. Early in the program you need to establish a time when you focus exclusive attention on your child in a special "playtime". Do not direct this playtime but rather participate by commenting on what you observe and offer strong encouragement of appropriate behavior.

Number 9: While there is a requirement for documentation it is essential that this be done on a daily basis. Both parents in the home need to understand and be involved in the daily tracking of behavior. Inconsistency of a parent means that the program will not provide a measured sense of reinforcement.

Number 10: Learning to give effective commands is a cornerstone of the program. Parents, in their communication with children, may phrase a directive in a passive manner or as a simple request. You will learn from your counselor about giving effective commands.

Daily Tracking Sheet

Jonathan

Date: _____

DAILY INCOME OPPORTUNITIES

<u>Task</u>	<u>Chips</u>	<u>Approved by</u>
1. Up from bed on first request	5	
2. Dressed, shoes on, by 7:30 a.m.	5	
3. To stay still in church, per 5 minutes	10	
4. To go to bed by himself	30	
5. Say please/thank you (max 1 per hour)	10	
6. Bath taken, hair washed, soap used	10	
7. Teeth brushed 2 times daily	20	
8. No marks from school	10	
9. Toys picked up and in proper place by bedtime	10	
10. In bed by 9:00	10	

WEEKLY INCOME OPPORTUNITIES

<u>Task</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Approved by</u>
1. Bedroom cleaned, toys picked up and put in proper place, closet neat, bed made	40	
2. Dirty clothing in hamper	10	
3. Help clean out/wash cars	20	
4. Pick Up Trash	20	
5. Empty dishwasher	20	
6. Reading, per 15 minutes	10	

Daily Expense Listing

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Account Summary for this date

Total Points Earned _____

Total Points Spent _____

Carry Over Points _____

Expense Listing

Jonathan

<u>Item/Activity</u>	<u>Point/Token Cost</u>
1. Television, cartoons, per 30 min.	40
2. Ice Cream, per scoop	20
3. Nintendo time, per 15 minutes	20
4. Read book to him at bedtime	20
5. Ride his bike, per 15 minutes	20
6. Special playtime with mom/dad, per 30 min.	10
7. Renting videotape (max 2 a week)	30
8. New Coloring Book	50