

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Rationale

Children are cute, cuddly critters who can be holy terrors at times if allowed. Parents are given to children to guide them, help them develop mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually, and to launch them as responsible, independent, community-conscious adults. Helping them traverse that rocky, pock-marked road from infancy to adulthood can be scary, yet enticing, dangerous, but engaging, for both you and your child. Any and all tools available to families that help them succeed on this journey should be considered.

Behavior management strategies provide such tools to help your child over the rough spots and to grow. Effective behavior management strategies provide incentive for him, an understandable rationale and context for positive behavior change, and a spirit of ownership and cooperation in making the changes. One such strategy follows.

The Good Kid Chart

The attached Good Kid Chart is an engaging, fun means of helping your child track behavior change over time. Many parents make the mistake of simplifying the process. They tell their child, “If you do good in school between now and your next report card, I’ll take you to Disney World.” This is not a behavior management strategy. It is doomed to fail because it’s one-dimensional. While parents who use this ploy are well intentioned, there are several fatal flaws.

First, the target behavior, do good in school, is vague and over-generalized. If you do not specifically agree on the obtainable, positive goal, then you could be expecting one thing, while your child is working on another.

Second, the time frame for the reward is way too long. While the attention span of children does lengthen as they grow older, even teenagers top out at about two weeks. Report cards are six to nine weeks apart. Children lose interest in even the grandest of goals as the time frame to reward lengthens.

Third, a single reward is easily dismissed by children. When children realize that they've blown it, that they will not get the reward, then they frequently rationalize that they weren't interested in the goal anyway. This rationalization helps children save face and shifts the blame for their failure to the parents, for not providing the "right" reward.

The Good Kid Chart, and the process developed to guarantee successful, positive behavior change, addresses these pitfalls of one dimensional bribery. The following steps will lead your child to embrace the change process and reach their goals.

STEP ONE --- DEFINING TARGET BEHAVIORS

In creating the Good Kid Chart, you will want to talk about what behavior changes you want your child to make. Then, list these changes in the left-hand column as target behaviors. Be very careful to word your target behaviors in positive terms. Children get confused and do not easily work toward a negative. For example, "Don't hit your sister," becomes "Play nicely with your sister." The result is the same, but the child responds better to the positive context. As a rule of thumb, children under age 10 usually can handle working on no more than three target behaviors at a time. Older children can handle up to five.

STEP TWO --- DEVELOP CONTENT FOR POSTERS

After you have agreed on the number and positive wording of the target behaviors, buy three, 17 x 30” posters of different, bright and bold colors. Children are drawn to bold colors.

Title the posters: Daily Rewards, Weekly Rewards, and Consequences.

Agree on a time for a family meeting to introduce and explain the Good Kid Chart to the children, give rationale for each target behavior, and have the children join you in creating lists of rewards and consequences. Each poster should have 6-10 items. All items are within your time and financial constraints.

For each poster, have a brainstorming time with your children to encourage their participation. Write down on paper all of their ideas and all of yours, no matter how wild or far out. After everybody is talked out, go back through the list with attention to the do-ability in terms of time and finances.

DAILY REWARDS --- These items need to be available to your child right before bedtime each night. After the Good Kid Chart is reviewed and he has met criteria for a reward, give the reward immediately and with great fanfare and verbal praise. Therefore, items on the Daily Reward List need to be readily accessible. For example, some families have included such items as a bedtime snack, staying up an extra fifteen minutes, reaching into a grab bag full of small toys, listening to soft, bedtime music, and so forth. It is important that you accept some of your child’s ideas, as well as offering your own for the list.

WEEKLY REWARDS --- These items become available at the conclusion of the week on the Good Kit Chart. They are more expensive and time-consuming because they acknowledge that your child has strung together several good days in a row. He’s beginning to make a good and lasting change. However, overall time and financial constraints still apply. Usually, children

can pick one item from the Weekly Reward List on Fridays, as the reward options are greater then. For example, some families have included such list items as having a sleepover, putting together a popcorn and movie DVD night, developing a play date, going out to dinner (Chuck E. Cheese?), and so forth. Longer term rewards, such as that trip to Disney World, are not included on these lists. Do not put any item on either list that you would not let your child pick.

CONSEQUENCES --- This third poster is also brainstormed, giving your child opportunity to contribute. Interestingly, most children are usually harder on themselves than are their parents on them. Having him add to the list, and subsequently pick his own consequence when one is required, increases his accountability and ownership for his actions. When you simply mete out consequences, your child can dismiss it by rationalizing that mama is “just being mean.”

However, when your child picks from a set list, some items of which he actually put on the list, he is more likely to accept that he screwed up and learn from his negative behavior. On this third poster, some consequences might include restriction, a pop on the bottom, loss of privilege, sitting in a corner, designated time out, and so forth.

Actually, two levels of consequence exist. First, it a consequence for your child to not earn a sticker for the Good Kid Chart. Second, if he “loses it,” then he doesn’t get the sticker AND he has to choose a consequence from the poster list. If he refuses to pick, the parent can simply pick for him. For example, if “playing nicely with your sister” is a target behavior, and he attacks her for some reason, then he both loses the sticker for that day and also gets a consequence.

Whenever your child does not earn a sticker, or gets a consequence, be sad and empathize with him. For example, you might comment, “I know you wanted to earn that sticker today. I’m

sorry you didn't quite get it. You're working hard, though, and I hope you earn it tomorrow."

When he has to pick a consequence, use your active listening with such comments as, "I'm sorry you got in trouble. Accepting that you made a bad choice is difficult. I hope you choose more wisely next time so you don't have to go back to the consequence poster."

STEP THREE --- DEVELOP A BASELINE FOR REWARD

After all is said and done, pick a starting day to begin using the Good Kid Chart. Put the chart and posters up in a conspicuous place (bedroom, kitchen, family room). Be excited about the system, positive about how you worked on it together, and eager to see how it works.

For the first week, use the Good Kid Chart **WITHOUT REWARD OR CONSEQUENCE**. This becomes the baseline measure to see how well your child adjusts to this new system. It also gives you a starting point for rewards and consequences. Does he average one, two, or three stickers per day even without getting a reward? How many stickers does he earn for the week?

After this week, he has to at least match his daily average to earn a reward for the day. He has to get his weekly average plus one more each week to earn a reward for the week. This incentive assures continuity and consistency in helping him develop new positive habits.

STEP FOUR--- USE OF THE GOOD KID CHART

Before getting started, ask your child how he would like to use the chart. Does he want smiley faces, stickers, or check marks in the circles? Let him choose and let him affix the sticker or mark **ONLY IF HE EARNS IT**. Some systems suggest smiley faces for success and frowny

faces for failure. I do not like to highlight failure. Missing the mark is implied when the circle is empty.

STEP FIVE --- PRAISE SUCCESS

Being excited for him and celebrating your child's success is as rewarding for him as any prize he might pick from the poster lists. Set a positive tone. Use what is called presuppositional phrasing when you talk to him about his success. Such wording presupposes positive outcome. For example, you might ask, "Which prize do you think you will pick when you rack up all those smiley faces?" The focus is not on "if" but rather on "when," not on "you can, or might" but rather on "you will."

When your child reaches criteria daily for 2-3 weeks, make a special occasion to acknowledge his efforts and success. Some parents have celebrated success with cupcakes and candles, a special meal, or a surprise not on either reward poster. After he achieves this kind of consistent success, you can remove that target behavior from the Good Kid Chart. He no longer needs to work on that one because he has mastered it. You can, however, talk with him about starting work on a new behavior to replace the mastered one.

STEP SIX --- CHART AND POSTER REVISION

An effective behavior management system is fluid. It allows for "do-overs." If he is not motivated by the items on either reward poster, then go back to the drawing board. Have another family meeting to re-vamp the lists. If he does not achieve smiley faces for a particular target behavior consistently, go back to the drawing board. Have a family meeting to make sure he understands what is expected of him. Make crystal clear the positive behavior he is working on.

If he continues to have difficulty, scale down your expectations by either shortening the time frame within which he can earn a sticker, or by breaking down the target behavior into smaller chunks for success.

NOTE: The Good Kid Chart is not meant to be used to keep up with chores or school grades.

These may be separate checklists or goal sheets for completion. Typically, chores are completed without extra compensation and not as contingency for allowance. Chore completion is acknowledgement by all that you are a family and that the load needs to be shared. Good grades are your child's way of demonstrating maturity and responsibility for learning.

However, you can negotiate with your children and contract work for pay outside of the normal chores. You can also reward him with money for grades, as extra incentive.

The Good Kid Chart is a tool for behavior management and to be used when your child's behavior is causing undue hardship for himself or others.

GOOD KID CHART

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRID	SAT
	<input type="checkbox"/>						
	<input type="checkbox"/>						
	<input type="checkbox"/>						
	<input type="checkbox"/>						
	<input type="checkbox"/>						

✓

achieved:

Higher Possible #:

Total:

CONTRACT BETWEEN: _____

DIRECTIONS: AT THE END OF THE DAY, DRAW IN A HAPPY FACE. STICKERS OR STICKERS IF THE GOAL WAS ACHIEVED AND LEAVE BLANK IF IT WASN'T

COMMENTS:

