

MOTIVATING CHILDREN WITHOUT BRIBERY...



A simple guide to rewards and reward systems for parents and caregivers.

IN THIS RESOURCE:

- What's the difference between bribes and rewards?
- How to encourage positive behaviour
- Reward systems

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BRIBE AND A REWARD?

It's a common misconception that there is not much difference between bribery and rewards. Both involve giving your child something they want in return for them doing something you want, after all. However, there are some key distinctions between the two and they make all the difference when it comes to your child's future behaviour; that is **when** and **why** they are given.



BRIBERY:

Put simply, a bribe involves giving your child something they want, with the expectation that it will lead to them doing something you want them to do, after the bribe. The trouble with this however, is that usually a bribe is offered as an act of desperation by a parent, to coerce a child to comply, usually in a state of duress. In these instances, the child is in control, they are getting the reward before the expected behaviour, lessening the chance that the behaviour will even eventuate and teaching the child the misbehavior in future can get them what they want. It can also lead to an increased sense of entitlement. While an occasional bribe may be okay, it is only a short-term fix and can become a pattern, leading to worse long-term problems.

REWARDS:

The difference with a reward, is that it is only given after a desired behaviour and it is not given with the intent of manipulation. Rewards can be spontaneous or predetermined. With predetermined rewards, both parent and child know what the reward will be and for what behaviour it will be given, well ahead of time. For example, it might be a known rule for your whānau that if a child finishes all their dinner, they get dessert. Spontaneous rewards are also incredibly effective at promoting positive behaviour, so long as the child knows what they are being rewarded for. For example, if you see your child sharing with another child, praising them for that behaviour would be a spontaneous reward, or you may choose a physical reward such as a small treat.



ENCOURAGING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

It is unrealistic to expect that children will behave perfectly all of the time. There will always be instances where children will misbehave and push the boundaries, as this is a normal part of development. However, there are ways in which parents and caregivers can motivate children to do the right thing, most of the time, without the need to resort to manipulation or bribery.

Providing an environment in which children are encouraged to behave in a positive manner will reduce the need to resort to these kinds of measures and teach children how to make positive decisions independently.

Ensuring your child has plenty of love and support in the home is the basis for the development of any skill. Show your children love and respect and explain your expectations of them in a way that they can understand. Show them the proper way to behave, rather than just telling them. Provide them with plenty of supervision and when you see them behaving well, reward them. Remembering, rewards do not have to be material, praise and attention are rewards which your child will crave and appreciate the most.

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REWARD SYSTEMS

Using a physical reward system can also be an effective form of motivating children, particularly older children (4+ years). Star or sticker charts are one of the most common forms of reward systems used by parents and when implemented properly, can be highly effective in motivating children.

To increase the chances of a reward system being successful, there are a few simple tricks that parents/caregivers can use:

- Don't overcomplicate it. Pick one or two behaviours to focus on
- Focus on the effort not the behaviour. This will encourage children to persevere. A good example of this is toilet training, reward the effort of using the toilet, regardless of whether they are successful or not
- Reward often. Young children don't have the attention span to look towards long term goal. Allow the child to trade in their stamps or stickers for a reward each day
- Pick rewards based on your child's interest. Not all children will be tempted by stickers, choose your reward system and rewards based on what you know will spark your child's interest

Long term reward systems, such as star charts, are more effective for older children. For very young children, (those under four) instant rewards, such as a stamp on the hand, following a positive behaviour, are much more effective.



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