

## Using Reward Charts to Help Children Learn New Skills

Throughout childhood, kids are constantly challenged with learning new skills. Since all kids have different strengths and challenges, what they struggle with will be different from kid to kid. When a child is doing poorly with a new skill from sitting at their desk during homework time, to sharing with a sibling, to putting away their things when they're done playing, a reward chart can be very helpful to get them started in the right direction.

### Rules for Effective Reward Charts

1. **Keep it simple.** Use only one to three charts at a time. Consider using 4 X 6 cards; they are durable and inexpensive as well as easy to carry around. Use stickers to mark each success.
2. **Explain the chart ahead of time.** *"You've been doing really well at being polite at the dinner table and at getting along with your sister. I'd like to help you to get a little better at using your homework time well. Every time I see you mostly working during your homework time, I am going to put a sticker on this card. When you've got 5 stickers, lets pick something off this list for a reward for you."*
3. **Choose a number of successful events they need to earn a reward.** *You'll want to pick a number low enough that they are likely to succeed the first time and experience some success, but not a number so low that it is not at all challenging.*
4. **Make sure rewards are low cost, no cost, or if they cost more make sure that they are something you are looking forward to as well.** Maybe you love to iceskate and the reward is that you'll take your child iceskating. That is a win-win scenario.
5. **Never take away stickers for misbehavior.** Once they've earned the sticker it is theirs to keep. When they don't earn one and they argue about it, express sadness that they didn't get it, emphasize that they'll have another chance soon, and move on.

Reward charts, when kept simple, can be a great help in keeping us focused on recognizing and reinforcing the behaviors we want to see more of. Try one out this week.

