

What You Always Wanted to Know About Praise and Rewards

1. *Shouldn't children at this age already know what is expected of them and how to behave?*

Behavior that is acknowledged is more likely to occur again. Behavior that is ignored is less likely to be repeated. No good behavior should be taken for granted or it may decline, regardless of the student's age.

2. *Praising feels unnatural. Won't kids think that it is phony?*

If you are not used to praising, it will feel unnatural at first. But the more you praise, the more natural it will feel. If you praise good behavior that truly has happened, there is nothing phony about it. Students who get praise will tend to praise others too. So praise won't seem phony to them.

3. *Isn't praise manipulative and coercive?*

The purpose of praise is to reinforce and increase positive behavior with the student's knowledge. Praise helps clearly describe expectations so that students can successfully meet them. Helping children succeed is a positive thing to do!

4. *Isn't giving a reward like bribing students to do what you want them to do?*

A bribe attempts to influence or persuade someone to produce a desired behavior that hasn't yet happened, whereas a reward reinforces a desired behavior that has already happened. A reward is given after the behavior occurs.

5. *Won't students come to depend on tangible rewards? Don't extrinsic rewards decrease intrinsic motivation?*

Tangible rewards should be accompanied by social rewards. When a message that recognizes a student's efforts as being responsible for success is given with a reward, internal motivation will actually be strengthened.

6. *Shouldn't rewards be saved for special achievements?*

This gives students the message that everyday behaviors and efforts don't count. Small steps on the way to achievement (such as homework completion) also need to be recognized and rewarded.

7. *Where will I get enough money to supply all these rewards?*

Tangible rewards need not be too expensive. As students learn the desired behavior, the tangible rewards can gradually be faded out. Rewards can be privileges too, such as being able to go to lunch first or getting extra computer time.

8. *Do students in middle school and high school still need rewards?*

People of all ages, including adults, need to be recognized and rewarded for their efforts. Students of all ages do need recognition, praise, and rewards, particularly during the difficult transition to adolescence.

