

# Positive Reinforcement

## What is positive reinforcement?

- Pairing a positive or desired behavior with a reward or positive attention in order to increase the likelihood of the positive behavior happening again.



## How does positive reinforcement work?

- Parent's attention is one of the most powerful things for children to earn. We want children to know what we want them to do.
- When we pay attention to a child's positive behaviors, the child learns that they can earn their caregivers' attention or receive rewards if they keep doing positive behaviors, and thus we often see an increase in these desired behaviors.
- Try providing verbal praise or physical attention (e.g., high five) immediately following a desired behavior. This works best when you are specific about the behavior you are rewarding so the child can learn what exactly you want from them (e.g., "I like that you put away your car on the shelf quickly - - high five.")
- You can also provide a reward (e.g., sticker) when your child engages in a positive behavior or reaches a goal (e.g., puts away their toys, plays nicely with their sibling). This works best when you start with small and easily described goals that your child can do pretty easily, so they can learn how rewards follow positive behavior. The difficulty level of the goals can then be gradually increased.
- Sometimes parents may feel "my child should know..." Often children need to experience the positive reward to learn what behavior you want to see.

## TIPS For Parents

- Contingent rewards/attention: Try to only provide the positive reinforcement if your child *does* complete the positive behavior they were expected to complete. This can be very challenging to do, especially if your child gets upset about not earning a reward. However, this is the most effective way to increase positive behaviors. For example, if the child says "I'll clean up my room after I go to the party" they should not get the reward until the room is clean.
- Consistency: Positive reinforcement works best when you give the reward each and every time the child does the behavior. That way it is clear to the child what behavior you are looking for.
- Immediate reinforcement: Positive reinforcement works best when offered *immediately* following the positive behavior (e.g., giving a sticker right after the child sits quietly at the table, rather than offering a reward in the future or even later that day). This is especially important for younger children and for when you are first introducing positive reinforcement.
- Visual charts: Children often enjoy visual charts to see their progress on certain behaviors. Try hanging a chart on the refrigerator where the child can see their stickers/points/stars accumulate.
- Time for behavioral change: It can take 1-2 weeks to see increases in positive behaviors, as the child is learning a new skill. Try not to be discouraged if it doesn't work right away- just keep being consistent.

### Resources

<https://www.handinhandparenting.org>  
<https://foundationspediatrics.com/>

### Recommended Resources

<http://www.cdc.gov/parents/index.html>

# Special Time

## What is special time?

- Special time is setting aside a set period of time (approximately 5-10 minutes per day) that you spend with your child for the purpose of building a healthy relationship. This time often includes a shared and fun activity.



## How does special time work?

- Most parents are busy, stressed, and under a lot of pressure to do a lot of things at once. This can make it really challenging to spend relaxed, warm, and attentive time with your child.
- Special time can be a period each day that is just for playing and being together. Life can get filled with demands and pressures and schedules, and this time helps set aside time for bonding. Research shows that positive bonding is associated with better behavior. Research shows as little as 5-10 minutes per day can be very effective.

## TIPS For Parents

- Less demands or questions: During this time, try your best to not ask questions or put demands on your child. Let your child take the lead in the conversation as much as possible. Think of yourself as a reporter, and comment on the activities you observe your child doing.
- Name this time. It doesn't have to be called special time, but give this time a name, so that you and your child both have a label for this important time together and know when it is happening. Be consistent; if the time is scheduled, try as hard as possible to make sure it happens. If you can't do it, let your child know when you can reschedule it.
- Child in Charge: During special time, try letting your child be in charge. Show your child as much enthusiasm, cooperation, and openness as possible. Try letting your child choose whatever it is they would like to do (as long as it's safe, feasible, and allows for playing together).
- Be mindful: Try letting go of the things on your mind for special time. It works best when parents turn their phone on silent or leave their phone in the other room. Try to be present while watching your children learn and grow.
- One child at a time: Special time works best one on one, when possible. If you have more than one child, try setting aside special time for each child. If each child knows when their own special time is scheduled, they will be less likely to be upset when you are with the other child.

### Resources

<https://www.handinhandparenting.org>  
<https://foundationspediatrics.com/>

### Recommended Resources

<http://www.cdc.gov/parents/index.html>

## Planned Ignoring

### What is planned ignoring?

- Planned ignoring is when we take away attention on purpose.
- The goal of ignoring negative behaviors is to decrease their frequency. Planned ignoring is often effective when a child is doing something annoying or frustrating, but not harmful or dangerous.



### How does planned ignoring work?

- When you notice a negative behavior beginning, withdraw attention from your child (that can include turning your body, removing eye contact, and not yelling or talking to them). Monitor your child without engaging with them to make sure they are safe.
- As soon as your child stops the negative behavior, return your attention to them and provide reinforcement (e.g., “I like how you asked me for what you want in a calm voice.”)
- Often times, when a child engages in a negative behavior, we respond with negative attention (e.g., “Stop doing that now.”) While this works sometimes, it can make the behaviors actually get worse because the child is getting attention for these behaviors, even if it’s negative. For children, any attention is better than none.
- Parent’s attention is one of the most important things for children. Children can actually work to get negative attention because it is still their parent paying attention.

### TIPS For Parents

- Be prepared for a temporary increase in negative behaviors. Sometimes when you start ignoring negative behaviors, the child will increase their behaviors in the beginning because they are trying hard to get your attention back. It can take a week or two for behaviors to reduce. Just remember to stay consistent so you don’t have to start all over again.
- Some parents find it helpful to have a book/magazine with them at times when they anticipate their child might engage in negative behaviors. This gives you something to do and helps you keep your attention away from your child.
- Consistency is key. If you are consistent in your use of planned ignoring for negative behaviors that are not dangerous, while reinforcing positive behaviors, negative behaviors will likely decrease and positive behaviors will likely increase.

#### Resources

<https://www.handinhandparenting.org>  
<https://foundationspediatrics.com/>

#### Recommended Resources

<http://www.cdc.gov/parents/index.html>