

## Rewards

Which is more effective in motivating children – rewards, or punishment?

Children flourish and grow as parents and teachers encourage and reward them. Sometimes it is still necessary to use a negative reinforcement, but as much as possible teachers should endeavour to use positive means. And not just when they ‘succeed’ in a task, or get an answer totally correct. Children should also be rewarded when they try hard (even if they don’t really totally succeed).

### Be aware of the “5 Love Languages”

Children (*and adults too*) respond to different ‘languages of love’. What motivates and encourages one, may not do so (or not to the same extent) for another. So when we attempt to motivate children, we should use a variety of rewards in order to hopefully cover all of the children’s needs. Basically the 5 languages are:

- Physical touch - they like to receive hugs, kisses, and high-fives.
- Words of affirmation – they like others to use words to *tell* them that they are special and that they do a good job.
- Gifts - they feel good when someone *gives* them a special present or surprise.
- Acts of service - they like it when others do nice things *for* them such as helping with chores, helping with school projects, or driving them places.
- Quality time – they like it when others do things *with* them like play a game, watch television, or go on an outing.

#### *In the context of the primary school classroom:*

**Physical touch** obviously needs to be used carefully – a touch on the arm or a high-five or fist-bump is probably safest.

**Words of affirmation** – these can be used quite freely, encouraging every child whenever possible, but being honest and fair all the same. The teacher could also award children with a small personal ‘certificate’ specifically for good behaviour or work.

**Gifts** – the teacher needs to be careful about giving gifts in the classroom as this could quickly escalate into an expensive problem. However, there are suitable inexpensive gifts – stationary items (pencils, erasers), stickers (or post-it notes) or vouchers that can add up to something bigger etc. Sweets can be given only very sparingly as children are really better off without a lot of sugar!

**Quality time** – this seems like the easiest of all, but when there are a lot of children in the class it can be difficult for a teacher to give quality time to each one who needs it. For many children, it is the teacher’s attention and time that they crave. And many children who misbehave do so because they want the teacher to give them time and it seems to be the only way. If and when possible, quality time with the teacher should be used as a reward for children who do well or try hard.

The teacher’s **smile** and **words** of encouragement, and **body language** (a ‘high five’ or a ‘fist bump’) are the cheapest, easiest, and often most effective rewards. The **absence of criticism** is a reward for some children who don’t get encouragement elsewhere. Even if their work is not as perfect as we

(or they) would like to see, noticing the smallest improvement, or even an *attempt* to improve, can be like gold to a frustrated child.

### **One simple way to reward children:**

- Make a chart on the wall with a list of their names and maybe 5 spaces (not too many) next to their names. When they finish a piece of work (like writing) you (or they) can put a star / sticker / mark against their name. Maybe when you mark it, if it is *good*, they could get a second mark.
  - Note: you want this to be encouraging, not discouraging. So if you see that a student is not getting any marks, find out why. Maybe they have a learning difficulty (I think there is one boy there with a learning problem) you could give them a smaller task – give them a mark if they finish a smaller amount or something. Don't embarrass them because that won't help.
  - The first chart should fill quickly. It's good if you can have a reward for those who fill the whole row first – a chance to do something special for a few minutes, a sweet, a pencil ... Then make a new chart. More spots to fill this time.

### **Temporary Chart for rewards**

Even easier is a quick chart on the board. During the course of a lesson children's names can be written up with stars next to them – counted up and commented on at the end before being erased.

This, of course, can be varied in creative ways from lesson to lesson.