

Managing Challenging Behaviour: Setting up Charts

Parent's and Teacher's success with star charts varies considerably. If you have been unsuccessful in your attempts to implement a star chart in your classroom or home, chances are we can tweak the program to make it more likely to succeed. So before ruling this out as a strategy it is critical that you examine whether you have followed the correct steps in setting up a star chart properly. What sounds like a simple behaviour management strategy is actually more involved than many of us think - below are some tips to maximise the success of your star chart.

The goal of any star chart is to manage behaviours that are undesirable and increase the frequency of behaviours that are desirable. One way that we can do this is by having a system of rules, rewards and consequences. If managing behaviour clearly and consistently we should only need to use the rules and rewards components of the chart. It can be useful to see the consequences as your back up plan for emergencies.

RULES

- ★ Rules must be very clear and specific, avoid vague rules like "Be good".
- ★ Avoid using the word "No" or "Don't" when setting up rules, for example "Keep hands and feet to yourself" instead of "No hitting". Where possible phrase rules in the positive (the only exception to this is if phrasing the behaviour positively becomes a long and confusing sentence for a young child to understand).
- ★ Rules should be few (no more than 4 or 5).
- ★ A good rule (which covers many things and therefore helps to keep the list down to a minimum) is "Follow Instructions" or "Listen to mum and dad".

REWARDS

- ★ The rewards must be appealing for the child (but can be negotiated with teachers/parents).
- ★ Rewards must be immediate, especially for younger children (under 6 years).
- ★ Vary rewards (eg have a rewards box, where the child can choose the reward they feel like on the day).
- ★ Use a range of rewards including praise, affection, non-verbal praise eg thumbs up, smiles, high fives, small treats, trips to the park etc.
- ★ Avoid larger monetary rewards, especially those that will take weeks or months to earn as this is too difficult a goal to reach for and the child as well as teacher/parent will lose interest.
- ★ Be sure to reward the behaviour you have told your child you are going to reward eg pick a target behaviour and make sure you catch your child when they do it.
- ★ The parent/teacher should notice the behaviour, rather than hand out rewards because the child has reported that “I kept my hands and feet to myself, now you can give me a sticker”.
- ★ Phase out rewards to make them harder to achieve as the child experiences success.
- ★ Choose behaviours that are easy to measure.
- ★ Tell the child exactly what it is you are rewarding when you hand out the stamp, sticker etc, don't just say “well done”.
- ★ Be creative, some children love receiving tokens or vouchers which they can then exchange eg extra TV or computer time, choice of family movie for Friday night etc.
- ★ NEVER remove a reward once it has been achieved. If a child has worked hard to earn a star/ sticker/voucher etc, never take this away. It will make them lose interest in the chart.
- ★ Make the goal achievable, for example do not expect 100% success in the first week. Chose a goal that you know your child can achieve. For example if your goal is that your child makes their bed, reward, each time they make their bed and then build up to a larger reward at the end of the week if they made their bed twice that week. You can then build it up to 3, 4, 5 and 7 before phasing out the reward for that behaviour and starting on the next.

Remember our goal is not to implement consequences, they are a last resort as they do not change behaviour in the long term. We want to avoid consequences where possible by having great systems and consistency set up. We use consequences when we need to stop a behaviour in the short term for example due to safety.

CONSEQUENCES

- ★ Consequences must be immediate (avoid the use of delayed time out in young children as it will be ineffective).
- ★ Consequences must be clearly explained to the child when they are calm eg at the dinner table.
- ★ New consequences should never come as a surprise to your child.
- ★ Consequences should be chosen by the adult not the child.
- ★ Consequences should be different to the reward - for example, if your child can choose to stay up later on Friday night as their reward, then their consequence should not be going to be earlier. An example of keeping them separate might be that they have a trip to the park on Saturday after earning the goal number of tokens in a week, whereas the consequence might be that they lose their PlayStation for 24 hours.

Consequences should build up rather than being too severe too quickly. For example ensure you are using a hierarchy of consequences, which might include:

- ★ Planned ignoring (for minor behaviours like whinging and whining).
- ★ Quiet time (child stays in the same room as rest of family but attention, eye contact etc is removed, might be on a mat at the edge of the room, number of minutes per age).
- ★ Warning (repeat instruction and tell the child what the next consequence will be).
- ★ Time out (as per quiet time but in another room - avoid bedrooms if there are toys to play with as this is a reward not a consequence).
- ★ Warning (repeat instruction and add the next consequence eg "You have not sat quietly in time out, the next step will be to lose XX for 1 day").
- ★ Loss of privilege (always for short amounts of time, no more than 1 day for younger children and 1 week for older).