Setting Up a Reward System at Home

Reward systems work well at motivating children and often, remarkably quickly. During periods of Home Learning, parents can reap the benefits of a reward system to motivate their child's learning from home.

Nursery and Reception Children

Nursery and Reception age pupils are enamoured with sticker charts (see some examples attached). You might also let them choose their stickers. Although the privilege of choosing stickers is often lost on adults, little ones do not take it lightly. In the long run, your child loving their chosen sticker will only increase their motivation to earn them.

If you haven't got any stickers at home, try adding a tick or smiley face.

Here are a few musts for sticker charts:

1. Make sure the sticker chart is visible to your child (ie stick on the fridge, bedroom wall etc) As they say, you've got to 'keep your eye on the prize'. Young learners will be reminded of the chart when they glance upon it and seek to earn stickers by modelling sticker-earning behaviour.
2. Clearly explain behaviours and achievements to your child that earn stickers. In order to encourage and reward the behaviours you're working towards; your child will need to know what they are e.g. all Maths tasks completed = 1 sticker
3. Be consistent. If your child feels as though they receive stickers at random, they're unlikely to abide by any sort of behaviour to earn them.

Year 1 upwards

If stickers alone start to lose their appeal, identify what privileges or rewards motivate your child.

You might want to begin by simply asking them what rewards they might be willing to work for. When first trying out a reward system, your child needs to see it delivers, so start out small.

At this age, small knick-knacks and toys can go a long way. Smaller prizes serve children well because they can receive them more often. Most reward systems work best with frequent and predictable positive reinforcement.

You then need to decide at what point they receive a prize – ie 5 stickers on their chart?

Another idea is to fill a jar, paper cup or small Tupperware container with pieces of dry pasta. They can earn pieces of pasta for completing work ie one piece of pasta per question completed or a maximum of 10 per lesson (parent/carer can decide how many pieces to award based on effort, amount completed, success, standard of presentation etc). Let the child count their pieces as they add them to the container. When the jar, cup, container is full (or reaches the line you've drawn on it), they receive a small prize.

Remind your child of the system as they're completing their work e.g. 'Remember, you get a piece of pasta per question, you've got 5 so far!' or 'If you finish this, do a really good job, I might give you 10 pasta pieces!'

Make sure that it does not take too long to reach the top as your child may lose interest. A small prize, received more regularly may work better than building up to a larger reward. However, you can adapt this strategy to suit the needs of your child.

Older Children

Reward systems for older children tend to look really different from their younger counterparts. No longer do small prizes grab student's attention, and if they do, it's unlikely to be held for long. More often, older children are motivated by rewards in the form of privileges. For instance, your child may want to earn additional gadget/television time, a later bedtime, additional pocket money or a take away treat. At this age, it's important to make sure you and your child have clearly defined the terms of your agreement, and that the system is fair and worthwhile.

When reward systems are properly implemented, the effects can seem magical. The positive reinforcement of the habits you're hoping

to instil can quickly crystallize routines for children and the excitement of prizes and rewards adds a fun and practical finish line for children.

If you feel like your reward system is falling flat, don't worry, it can take time for your new system to become seamless. If the reward system seems to be missing something, it's likely a consequence of inconsistent use, or unclear expectations. Once set up, an at-home reward system is fairly easy to sustain and serves everyone.