

## **Should Fathers Reward Their Children?**

For many years there has been a debate about rewarding our children. Does it work? Should I do it and if so what kind of rewards should I use?

If rewards did work they would help us to raise responsible and well-adjusted children. Let's look at how rewards really do work.

To use rewards with our kids we first see them in the act of doing something we approve of or we must set a standard that they must meet. We use punishment in the same way. We are aware of them doing something we disapprove of and we then shell out the punishment.

The problem here is not that rewards and punishments don't have immediate results. They often do have quick results. Kids often will become more obedient when threatened with punishment and work hard when promised a valuable reward.

The problem is what happens when authority figures aren't around.

To develop responsible, self-disciplined kids, fathers can promote certain ideas. One of these ideas might be that your family does certain things because everyone pitches in and helps in your family. Another might be that there can be enjoyment in doing any task if we choose to make it so. Even if it's a task we don't like doing we understand that it's for a good cause (our family can enjoy the house more because I helped clean it).

This is how we help them develop an intrinsic sense of value. When our children have this intrinsic sense of value they will be more responsible, more disciplined, and they will control their emotions better.

They learn that we often do things because there is some inherent value in doing these things and

that they are necessary and sometimes even enjoyable!

When we give rewards to our kids for the things they do we effectively reduce any intrinsic sense of value that they have. We also create children who may temporarily perform to a certain standard but who aren't likely to continue the performance without the carrot dangling in front of them. These kinds of values must come from inside of our children.

In his book, *Punished by Rewards* (1993), author Alfie Kohn writes, "But if we are ultimately concerned with the kind of people our children will become, there are no shortcuts. Good values have to be grown from the inside out."

"Rewards and punishment can change behavior (for a while), but they cannot change the person who engages in the behavior, at least in the way we want. No behavioral manipulation ever helped a child develop a commitment to become a caring and responsible person. No reward for doing something we approve of ever gave a child a reason for continuing to act that way when there was no longer any reward to be gained for doing so."

Fathers can also remember how important it is to allow your young children to help out with tasks around the house (without being rewarded!) Children naturally want to help out their parents and to be a part of the family chores. Some researchers have suggested that one of the main factors responsible for success and happiness in adults is how involved they were in doing household chores when they were as young as age three or four!

Fathers can tap into this natural inclination of children to be involved in family chores and allow them opportunities to be active participants. While it's easy to do things yourself because of how messy or slow your children may be, it's far messier and slower in the future when they refuse to help out unless they are rewarded for it.

In other words, treat your kids like they're capable; give them tasks and you will be rewarded! Not only that, you won't have to give out any rewards!

Here are some action steps for fathers concerning rewards:

- Look at how you are doing or not doing rewards now. Are you promising candy for behaving well at grandma's house? Even the smallest rewards now can set the table for bigger expectations by your kids in the future.
- Start giving your kids tasks that they can be responsible for at a very early age. See them as capable of it and treat them that way.
- Talk often about how you are a family that works together and cooperates with each other in order to complete the tasks that need to be done.
- Use subtle rewards with your kids. "As soon as you clean up you can go to grandma's," can work very well. "If you clean up I'll give you some candy," will usually turn around and bite you in the rear later on.

Fathers can help give their children a sense of helping and shared responsibility for the family which can last a lifetime. The idea of cooperation for kids needs to be developed.

They learn it from the inside out. Help your kids to learn it and you'll both benefit.

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