

INCENTIVES REALLY WORK

by Sally and Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

It doesn't take long for the home atmosphere to become negative when we spend so much time correcting our kids. Negative vibes fueled by rebuke, frustration and tension replace fun and joy. It is up to us as parents to monitor the home atmosphere to prevent it turning sour.

Many parents train their children by correcting them when they do 'wrong' rather than explaining what their expectations are first. A simple training plan is the first step to making training a positive rather than a predominantly corrective experience. These are the steps. Decide and write down the values or principles you want your family to live by. Explain your expectations to your children (making sure you only work on a few at a time). Show them what the expectation will look like (role model it). Work with them and then let them practice, allowing time for mistakes. Praise them for getting it right. Correct them if they get it wrong. Give them responsibility for that skill or activity once they have mastered it.

Creating an incentive scheme is an excellent method of avoiding constant rebuke and replacing it with the opportunity for praise. When you think of your own training experiences I am sure you recall responding willingly and with confidence when your efforts were recognized and praised, rather than your mistakes being ridiculed. Incentive schemes really do work.

Many years ago my husband, Brian, discussed using incentives with a woman whose daughter had a very negative attitude towards them as parents and was starting to get into trouble at school. The mother's response was absolute refusal as she considered incentives were merely a bribe. As a result her child continued down a negative path until she was made a ward of the State. The daughter eventually 'divorced' her parents, and then her daughter, in turn, also became a ward of the State. History repeated itself. If only they had concentrated on the positive aspects of her behavior and given her incentives to make changes, we feel she would be in a very different situation and state of mind now.

Creating an incentive scheme has many advantages. It requires that parents first explain what they want their child to achieve. It requires the child to make choices. Something good is going to result if they do what is required of them. A negative choice will yield a corrective result. The parent is not the ogre here. The child makes the choice and the parent is merely responding to the child's decision. Life is full of choices. Why not learn to make the right choices by the reward of a positive response from those in authority over you.

There are many types of incentives. Money should not be one of them! Why? Daily chores are part of family life and responsibility. Each family member needs to learn to do their part willingly and not because they are paid for it. This also teaches children the value of performing acts of kindness for no monetary reward.

Small children tend to respond well to a rewards board with stars. When they complete a task they get a star. After so many stars they get to choose their favorite dinner, maybe watch a cool movie, or have extra playtime and so on. Older children may have a chores list which details the chore and when it is required to be completed. Their reward might be extra computer time, time out at the movies or more time doing some other favorite activity. You may want your child to reach for higher grades at school. In this case, you first need to do some homework. Research why the grades have been low. Check with the teacher. Ask your child. Check the homework plan. There could be a combination of reasons, but it is important to rule out any negative outside influences or physical reason for low performance. It could be that your child is actually working at their highest level already. If so, be satisfied!

You should have high expectations for your children. They rise to high levels if they know they are pleasing you. Help them to make goals and also help and encourage them to achieve greater heights. A happy child is: one who knows their parents are proud of them, who has learned to make wise choices through positive training experiences, and who has a sense of purpose in life. Training by way of incentives greatly enhances this outcome.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.