



Creative Ideas for Motivating Children

Finding activities and items that motivate children to complete difficult tasks or improve their behavior can be a struggle. Parents and professionals often search for inspiring new ideas to motivate children. This article focuses on versatile ideas that can be used in different situations. In all cases, rewards only work if children are motivated by them. Since children have different preferences, adjust the concepts in this article for your child's or your students' interests.

Use their Interests – If a child loves a specific topic such as horses, trains, or computers incorporate it into difficult activities to inspire them. For example, if a child has a hard time reading, look for topics on their favorite subject. If writing is a struggle, have them write about their passion. These interests also can be used as rewards. For example, give a child ten minutes on the computer or ten minutes reading about their favorite topic after finishing their math homework.

Fit Rewards Together – When children are working towards big goals, people often use tangible rewards. For example, if a child is learning to use the restroom, a reward for staying dry one week could be an action figure, but they could get a sticker on their chart each day. However, over the course of a few weeks, rewards can get expensive and children can find the rewards less interesting if they are not creative. Tangible rewards that go together can be very motivating. For example, an inexpensive plastic jewelry set can provide a number of little pieces that create a complete dress up set. A book with finger puppet characters can be fun and compelling. With these reward systems children can pick the item they want from the set and see the other things they are working towards.

Create Helping Roles – Some children will work for helping roles such as line leader, dry erase board cleaner, assistant dog washer (at home). Have a board of helper roles children can see and choose from or a set of helping roles folded in a hat and drawn for as a reward. Allowing a choice of opportunities is a way to let children feel grown up and learn that helping is fun. When children are engaged in roles they are focused and occupied. For example, if you are in the community, let a child help push the shopping cart (reward) if they hold your hand in the parking lot. They then will focus on pushing the cart while in the store. This is a helpful, fun, and engaging reward that could reduce unwanted behaviors in the store.

Use Natural Consequences – Often the logical consequences of behaviors are the most reinforcing. When children help make a snack, they get to eat it. When they put on their coat, they get to go outside. This same concept can be used for more difficult skills. For example, if a child likes using the pencil sharpener, let them sharpen their pencil after they finish their math work (skill they are working on), but before literacy time.

Personalize Rewards – Children like rewards that focus on them and their interests. Use a digital camera to make a reward with their picture or create a book about them doing something well. Seeing their name, image, and what the reward is for can be very motivating. Put their picture up as 'Worker of the Day' or 'Super Listener' to let them know they are doing a good job. Pictures of family, friends, or pets also can be used in rewards since many children are inspired by people close to them.

Share Ideas – Share information between home and school. There may be a reward or strategy parents or teachers find that can be applied across environments. This is also a way for children to have consistency between home and school.

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