

Firm, Fair & Consistent®

Albert Leonard Middle School
John Barnes, Principal

Parents Guiding Students for School Success

Is it a reward ... or is it a bribe?

Your child has been studying hard all week and you want to reward her for her good work. But you've heard that you are not supposed to use bribes. So what's the difference? Simply put: Rewards are earned with good behavior; bribes are offered to avoid or stop bad behavior. Although the incentive or the "prize" may sometimes be the same, the distinction is an important one:

- **Rewards.** When you give your child something desirable for her good behavior, you are giving her a reward she has earned. Your child might be motivated to turn her assignments in on time if she knows she'll earn the right to stay up later on Saturday night.
- **Bribes.** When you give your child something desirable in order to stop misbehavior, you are offering her a bribe. Your child might be whining about something she wants while you're standing in a checkout line. It's tempting to buy it for her just to get her to stop whining, and this will probably work—in the short term. However, you haven't taught your child to stop whining; you've taught her that whining gets her what she wants.

Rewards make a child feel the pride that comes from a job well done. Bribes, on the other hand, make a child feel powerful. And once parents start down the path of bribery, kids learn to expect a "this for that" arrangement, while parents find themselves forever at the bargaining table.



Be specific about respect

Respect as an abstract idea may be hard



for some children to understand. It helps to talk about specific actions your child can take to show respect.

For example, if your child interrupts, you might say, "When someone is talking, it's respectful to wait until the person is finished. Then you can take your turn."

You can also ask your child to think of specific behaviors that would show respect in the classroom. "What can you do to show your teacher respect?" (Raise your hand. Pay attention.)

When your child acts in a respectful manner, point it out to help him make the connection.

Use the power of expectations

The Pygmalion Effect, also known as the "self-fulfilling prophecy" is a long-recognized phenomenon about the power of expectations.



Studies have shown that when people are expected to behave a certain way, they tend to do just that.

This is great news! It means that if you expect your child to behave well, he's more likely to do so. Try it out. Say something like, "I bet you're going to wait patiently in this long line." Watch what happens.

Apply this idea to academic situations ... and see how often it works!

Source: R. Rosenthal and L. Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

When it comes to discipline, remember that you *can* turn back the clock.



If you relax a boundary and your child doesn't respond positively, you can always return to the way things were.

Don't think of it as failure. Simply explain to your child, "We tried letting you set your homework time, but twice this week you didn't get started on time and, as a result, you didn't have time to finish your assignments. We'll have to go back to our old rules." You can try again in a few months.

Get the most from downtime together

As your child gets older, hanging out with you may not come as naturally as it once did. But your time together is as critical as ever.



To make the most of it:

- **Skip the agenda.** Simply enjoy being together.
- **Follow her lead.** Ask what she would like to do.
- **Keep your tone positive:** "I love how you read to your brother last night." Don't use this time together as an opportunity to criticize.

Listen ... then let your child decide

Your child needs to make an important decision—and you're tempted to make it for him. But there's something you should do first: Listen to his reasoning. He may come to the right decision on his own and gain critical problem-solving skills in the process. Consider taking these steps:

1. **Rephrase what your child is trying to say.** For example, "You're embarrassed because you weren't able to stop the other team's winning goal. Now you're thinking about skipping the next game."
2. **Ask thought-provoking questions,** such as, "If you don't go to the game, how will you feel later? How will your coach and teammates feel?"
3. **Pay close attention.** Take your child's concerns and ideas seriously—but you have the final word. Emphasize the importance of honoring commitments. When it's time to sign up again, he can decide whether or not he wants to continue. For now, his team is counting on him.



Questions & Answers

Q: It's homework time, and I assume my child is working on her assignments in her room. But it turns out she's doodling, listening to music or just staring out the window. I end up furious; she ends up in tears. What should I do?

A: It's easy to see why you might get upset. When your child ignores her homework, it causes stress for everyone—you, her and the teacher! Here are some things you can do:

- **Talk to your child.** Find out if there is a specific problem. Does she find the work too hard? Is there too much of it? If she's avoiding assignments, it may be that the work is overwhelming her. Talk to her teacher about finding a solution.
- **Be sympathetic.** Don't excuse your child's homework avoidance, but do show her that you understand. "It looks like this is a tough assignment. Let's go over the instructions together."
- **Adjust her homework routine.** If your child isn't ready to hit the books right after school, give her some time to play or relax first. Consider having her do homework where you can keep an eye on her, such as at the kitchen table.
- **Don't shield her from the consequences.** You don't like to see your child get into trouble, but you're not doing her any favors if you rescue her when she fails to meet her obligations. If she doesn't hand in her work, let her face the consequences at school.
- **Celebrate her efforts.** When your child finishes her work on time, let her know how proud you are. It will reinforce her good behavior and make her feel terrific!



Combat boredom —explore the arts

Has your child developed a ho-hum attitude about school lately? Try nurturing her creative side!

Research shows that students who are involved in creative activities do better in school than those who are not. Look for ways to expose your child to the arts. For example, you might:

- **Attend** a local concert together.
- **Visit** a museum or art gallery.
- **Explore** acting, writing or art classes at your community center.

Source: "New NEA Research Report Shows Potential Benefits of Arts Education for At-Risk Youth," National Endowment for the Arts, <http://arts.gov/news/2012/new-nea-research-report-shows-potential-benefits-arts-education-risk-youth>.

Take the stress out of the holidays

'Tis the season for holiday fun! But too much cheer can create a season of not-so-festive misbehavior, too.

To make holiday time less stressful for everyone, make sure your child:



- **Gets enough sleep.** Stick to his regular bedtime.
- **Eats properly.** Make sure he's snacking on more than cookies and candy.
- **Remembers his manners.** If he receives a gift, remind him to say, "Thank you"—even if he's not crazy about what he receives.

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Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Erika Beasley

Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525

www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1545-7737