



## Verbal Reinforcements Shaping Positive Behaviour

### What Are They?

Verbal reinforcements are positive cues given verbally to affect children's responses to specific tasks or activities. Words rather than rewards emphasize good work. For example, if your child does a good job on their chores, you may say "Good job on doing the dishes! They are really clean!" This encourages them to do just as well next time. Verbal reinforcements can also be paired with rewards such as free-play time or a favourite snack. Compliments, encouragements and rewards are likely to increase the chances desirable behavior will happen again.



### Why Use Verbal Reinforcements?

Verbal reinforcements are useful in motivating children and shaping behavior. Using verbal praise can help maintain or strengthen existing behaviours and help develop new behaviours.

### When Do You Use Verbal Reinforcements?

Verbal reinforcements can be used immediately after the child has performed positive behaviors or when they need more encouragement to perform better. When the child is aware they are doing well, they will be motivated to continue practicing. Verbal reinforcements can also be used to correct negative behaviors. For example, instead of saying "Stop running in the hallway!" you can say, "Try walking in the hallway". Positively phrasing what you actually want the child to do will cue them to perform the behavior rather than using negative phrasing.

### TIPS FOR USE

- Try to find out what words or activities work best to reinforce the positive behavior. "Awesome, you hung up your coat all by yourself!"
- Timing and frequency of reinforcement should be consistent. Initially, reinforcement should occur after every incident of positive behavior. As the behavior becomes well learned, start to decrease the amount of reinforcement so the child does not come to expect reinforcement every time the behavior is performed correctly.
- Make sure non-verbal reinforcements match the verbal. In other words, when you are telling the child how great they did during soccer practice, make sure to say this with a smile and a pat on the back.
- Be cautious not to use the same words or phrases too often or the child may lose interest with this type of praise.
- Knowing the difference between bribery and reinforcement is important. Bribery is often used as a strategy to reward the child BEFORE the positive behaviour when the parent experiences resistance. Reinforcement is used AFTER they have already performed the positive behaviour.



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