



Using incentives to motivate your child

Incentives are rewards for good behaviors. Incentives are especially helpful for overcoming resistance when children are locked in a power struggle (control battle) with you over toilet training. They give the child a reason to leave the power struggle.

How to use incentives

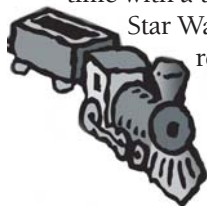
Four conditions are required to make incentives powerful:

- Your child strongly desires the incentive. Ask for your child's input ("What would help you remember to look after your poops?").
- You give the incentive immediately after the child meets the goal (releases urine or stool into the toilet, for example).
- You allow your child access to the incentive for 30 to 60 minutes.
- You, not your child, continue to own and control the incentive.

The last requirement is essential. The child's access to the incentive (a bike, costume, videotape, remote-control car, paint set, or whatever) must be time-limited. In essence, the child earns a privilege, not another possession. That's the only way to maintain the value of the incentive. None of the incentives discussed here is essential to normal child development, and that is why they can be selectively withheld.

Incentives to choose from

- Access to a new or favorite toy. (Examples: time with a tricycle or bicycle, train set, Star Wars toys, Lego sets, cars and trucks, remote-control car or dog, dinosaur



toys, jewelry kit, art or drawing supplies, water pistol, magic sword)

- New costume or outfit. (Examples: Batman or Superman, Snow White or Belle, nail polish, special shoes)
- Video time. (Examples: new videos, tapes of favorite TV shows, trip to the movie theater, new computer games)
- Special foods. (Examples: candy or other sweets, ice cream or popsicle, favorite cookies, other favorite foods such as pizza or strawberries, trip to the grocery store to pick out a favorite food or to a favorite restaurant or snack shop)
- Money
- Grab bag of surprises (written on pieces of paper)
- Triple reward for breakthroughs: Fast food restaurant, then video store and stay up late to watch the movie

Never withhold social reinforcers

Social reinforcers include physical affection (hugs and kisses) and parent-child activities (going to the library or zoo, reading stories or playing board games). Never withhold social reinforcers and use them as incentives because they are essential for your child's emotional growth and mental health. Moreover, nurturing makes your child more receptive to parental rules and requests. Never withhold physical activity (playing catch, walks, or going to the park) because fitness and endurance are essential to physical health. You can offer *extra* parent-child activities as incentives, however.