

Tips for Creating Successful Behavior Charts

A successful behavior chart is...

FUN! This means using positive language with goals that described the preferred behavior. For example, “Jessica will complete her daily math sheet with less than three prompts.” See how this differs from “Jessica will not distract peers during in-class work?” It also means personalizing the chart to include the child’s interests, such as a superhero theme or a basketball hoop.

Kids are most likely to follow a behavior chart if they find it...

Rewarding! The best charts focus on what the child is achieving and earning rather than losing a privilege. For example, Isaiah may earn a stamp or sticker (or superhero accessory or his first basket of the day) for ignoring or using appropriate coping skills following an event that is typically triggering. If Isaiah fails to use this skill appropriately during the latter part of his day, he would not earn a new sticker and he also would not lose the sticker previously earned.

For successful tracking of progress, a behavior chart is...

Measurable! Subjective goals such as “Got along with peers” are difficult to track and too abstract for many kids to fully understand. An easily trackable example is “Ellie will use I-Statements when addressing a peer.” Goals must be clear and expectations should be explained or pre-taught before charting begins.

To keep kids motivated, make sure your chart stays...

Achievable! Only include goals on Sam’s chart that are realistic and start with goals that he is likely to achieve within a reasonable time span. What is reasonable depends on the particular child’s developmental age and abilities. Better to make it too easy than too hard. Sam can start a new chart with the same goal for additional practice or a new goal following completion. Minimize the amount of goals on a chart. For an 8-year-old, 1-3 goals per chart is usually enough, but this is dependent on the individual child.

For best outcomes start small and think...

Short-term! If the long-term goal is for Mia to improve her frustration tolerance, this can be broken into several small and specific goals such as using her fidgets and the calm corner appropriately. Check-ins should be on a consistent basis each day so as to offer plenty of opportunities for Mia to review her behavior chart and earn something reinforcing (sticker, etc). For example, scheduled check-ins may be after each class period or other designated times such as after math, after lunch and during the afternoon transition. If Mia does not complete her chart, she can continue the next day.



Anger, frustration, fear and other feelings sometimes come to visit uninvited. They can be really strong and are sometimes a little tricky. Though feelings aren't bad, they might only know of a few ways to express themselves. Sometimes, they might suggest you behave in ways that won't end up being helpful in the long run. There are lots of positive ways that you can help those feelings express themselves. These are called coping skills. Here are some coping skills that many children (and adults!) find help them stay in control of their behaviors and express their feelings in a healthy way.

Blow bubbles	Use a fidget object	Listen to music
Play with putty or clay	Draw a picture	Practice yoga
Take a bath	Read a book	Organize something
Go for a walk	Take three deep breaths	Imagine your thoughts floating down a river
Ask a grownup for help	Trace an imaginary star on your palm	Make shadow puppets
Imagine your favorite calm space	String beads	Gently bite a length-wise pencil
Stretch deeply	Wrap up in a blanket	Go outside
Get a drink of water	Watch a calm jar or snow globe	Count the sounds around you
Make origami	Talk to a friend	Pop bubble wrap
Cuddle a pet or stuffed animal	Make a fort and hang out in it	Paint your nails
Write in a journal	Drink chamomile tea	Play an instrument
Braid some string or your hair	Smell something lavender-scented	Other: _____

Of the above options, what do you think would help most the next time you notice a strong feeling? Circle the ones that you want to try. After trying them, use the space below to write down your favorites. Hang this up in a place that's easy to see, like your fridge, so you can look through your coping skills the next time you need them.

