



Using Habits to Teach Your Child



Habits make it easier for your child to do what is right. If you do anything—good or bad—often enough and long enough, it will probably become a habit. If you teach good habits, the habits will help your kids know what to do next without you constantly reminding them. For example, they'll learn that playtime comes after homework, dessert comes after dinner, washing hands before dinner, etc.

Here's a few things I've learned about kids and habits:

It takes time to learn good habits, but they will eventually get it.

A habit my mom ingrained in me is brushing my teeth before bedtime. If I am exhausted and fall into bed without brushing my teeth, I hear her voice asking me, "Did you brush your teeth?" and I get up and brush my teeth!

Don't focus on too many things at once. Focus on one thing until they get it and then move on to something else. For example, this week work on putting things back where they belong. (That may take more than a week/lifetime!) Next week, work on making the bed every morning (or whatever is important to your family).

Be consistent. My kids would probably be more consistent if I were more consistent. Especially when you are first teaching a habit, stay with it. It takes more time (and energy) in the beginning, but once they get it, it will save you time.

Post fun reminders and charts. Kids love stickers and seeing their progress. Post a chart above the sink and let them add a sticker every time they brush their teeth. Every time someone puts their clothes in the laundry, add a star to a chart. Stage a friendly competition to see if the whole family can get a certain number of stars in a week. Make it fun!

Praise them enthusiastically! Praise seems to work better than correction when teaching a new skill. When they do it right, make a big deal of it—clap, high-five, do a happy dance, give a loud whoop, etc. Tell everyone in the house (and even the grandparents)! When everyone does it for a whole day or week, celebrate with a special treat or trip to the park (or whatever your family enjoys). It's easy to slip into the correcting mode and forget how much our kids need us to notice when they do it right.

