

## The Home Poker Chip/Point System

When trying to manage a child with behavioral problems, it is common to find that praise is not enough to motivate the child to do chores, follow rules, or obey commands. As a result, it is necessary to set up a more powerful program to motivate the child. One such program that has been very successful with children is the Home Poker Chip Program (for children 4–7 years old) or the Home Point System (for children 8 years old and older). Your therapist will explain in detail how to set up such a program, but here are the steps to follow:

### THE HOME POKER CHIP PROGRAM

1. Find or buy a set of plastic poker chips. If the child is 4 or 5 years old, then each chip, regardless of color, represents one chip. For 6- to 8-year-olds, the colors can represent different amounts: white = 1 chip, blue = 5 chips, and red = 10 chips. If you use the colors this way, take one of each color, tape it to a small piece of cardboard, and write on each chip how many chips it is worth. Post this card somewhere so your child can easily refer to it.
2. Sit down and explain to your child that you feel he or she has not been rewarded enough for doing nice things at home and you want to change all that. You want to set up a new reward program so your child can earn privileges and special items for behaving properly. This gives a very positive tone to the program.
3. You and your child should create a bank in which he or she will keep the chips earned. Banks can be made from a shoe box, coffee can (with a dull edge on the rim), or a plastic jar or another durable container. Have some fun decorating it with your child.
4. Now, you and your child should make up a list of the privileges you want your child to earn with the poker chips. These should include not just occasional special privileges (e.g., going to movies, roller skating, buying a toy) but also the everyday privileges your child takes for granted (e.g., television, video games, special toys already in the home, riding a bike, going over to a friend's home). Your therapist will explain what types of privileges you might include on this list. Be sure to have at least 10, and preferably 15, rewards on this list.
5. Now make up a second list that will contain the jobs and chores you often ask this child to perform. These can be typical household chores such as setting the table for a meal, clearing the table after a meal, cleaning a bedroom, making a bed, emptying wastebaskets, and so forth. Also include on the list things like getting dressed for school, getting ready for bed, washing and bathing, brushing teeth, or any other self-help tasks you give a child that normally pose a problem for you. Your therapist can help you decide what types of jobs to put on this list for your child's age group and special problems.

(continued)

### **The Home Poker Chip/Point System** (page 2 of 3)

6. Next, for each job or chore on the list, decide how much you feel it is worth in chips. For 4- and 5-year-olds, assign from 1 to 3 chips for most tasks and perhaps 5 for really big jobs. For 6- to 8-year-olds, use a range of 1 to 10 chips, and perhaps give a larger amount for big jobs. Remember, the harder the job, the more chips you will pay.
7. Take a moment and add up approximately how many chips you think your child will earn in a typical day if he or she does most of these jobs. Then, with this number in mind, decide how many chips your child should have to pay for each of the listed rewards. We generally suggest that two-thirds of the child's daily chips should be spent on his or her typical daily privileges. This allows the child to save about one-third of the chips every day toward the purchase of some of the very special rewards on the list. Don't worry about the exact numbers to use here. Just use your judgment as to how much each reward should cost, be fair, and charge more chips for the special rewards and less for the daily ones.
8. Be sure to tell your child that he or she will have a chance to earn "bonus" chips when he or she performs a chore in a nice, prompt, and pleasant manner. You will not give these bonus chips all the time, but you should give them when your child has done a job in an especially pleasant and prompt manner.
9. Be sure to tell the child that chips will only be given for jobs that are done on the first request. If you have to repeat a command to the child, he or she will not receive any chips for doing it.
10. Finally, be sure to go out of your way this week to give chips away for any small appropriate behavior. Remember, you can reward a child even for good behaviors that are not on the list of jobs. Be alert for opportunities to reward the child.

**Note: Do not take chips away this week for misbehavior!!!** You can do that when your therapist tells you to, but otherwise chips are to be used ONLY as rewards this week, not taken away as punishment.

### **THE HOME POINT SYSTEM**

1. Get a notebook and set it up like a checkbook with five columns, one each for the date, item, deposits, withdrawals, and running balance. When your child is rewarded with points, record the job under the "Item" and enter the amount as a "Deposit." Add it to the child's balance. When your child buys a privilege with his or her points, note the privilege under "Item," place this amount in the "Withdrawal" column, and deduct this amount from the "Balance." The program works just like the chip system except that points are recorded in the book instead of using poker chips.
2. Make up the lists of rewards/privileges and jobs as in the chip program just described. Be sure to give the same explanation to the child as to why the point system is being set up. Again, your therapist can help you with these lists.
3. When you get ready to determine how much each job should be paid in points, use larger numbers than in the chip program. We generally use a range of 5 to 25 points for most daily jobs and up to 200 points for very big jobs. Typically, you might consider paying 15 points for every 15 minutes of extended work a child has to do.

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### **The Home Poker Chip/Point System** *(page 3 of 3)*

4. Then add up how many points you feel your child will earn on an average day for doing routine jobs. Use this number to decide how much to charge for each privilege. Be sure the child has about one-third of his or her daily points free to save up for special privileges. Your therapist can help you in deciding how much to charge for each reward.
5. Follow the same guidelines in using the point system as were given for the chip program this week. Do not fine the child any points for misbehavior and pay points to the child only if he or she listens to the first command or request. Only parents are to write in the points notebook.

### **REMINDERS**

Review the list of rewards and jobs every month or so and add new ones to each list as you deem necessary. Check with your child for new rewards he or she may want on the list.

You can reward your child with chips or points for almost any form of good behavior. They can even be used in conjunction with Step 3 to reward your child for not bothering or interrupting your work.

Do not give the chips or points away before the child has done what he or she was told to do, only afterward. But be as quick as possible in rewarding the child for compliance. Don't wait to reward!

Both parents should use the chip or point system to make it as effective as possible.

When you give points or chips for good behavior, smile and tell the child what you like that he or she has done.