THE RESULTS OF REWARDS

Not feeling entirely comfortable with the use of punishments, many parents and teachers turn to the use of rewards, or perhaps use both. With the concerns about child abuse, as a society we have moved away from the practice of punishments, especially physical punishments, and have instead replaced it with the practice of rewards.

It is our contention, backed by research, that neither REWARDS nor PUNISHMENTS are helpful in educating our children toward becoming ethical, caring responsible adults. Why do we say this?

1. Rewards and punishments are two sides of the same coin: they are both concerned with CONTROLLING behaviors vs. TEACHING. It models the use of power as a means of solving problems.
2. Rewards and punishments are concerned with “DOING TO” vs. “DOING WITH.” They don’t teach cooperative problem solving, a necessary skill in today’s world.
3. Rewards and punishments DISTRACT children from the REAL issues, because they are more concerned with avoiding the punishment or gaining the reward vs. the INTRINSIC VALUE of the activity itself.
4. Rewards and punishments erode our RELATIONSHIP with our children, the single most important TOOL we have in influencing our children’s development.

ADDITIONAL RESULTS OF REWARDS:

REWARDS eventually lose their effectiveness, as the child loses interest in “working for” the reward, or may want rewards that are more appealing.

REWARDS may bring temporary “obedience,” but never help a child develop a commitment to a task or action when there is no “payoff.”

REWARDS teach kids to be self-centered: “What’s in it for me?” vs. doing the activity simply because it is worth doing for its own sake.

REWARDS are discouraging, because they are conditional on the successful completion of the activity vs. the effort being made regardless of outcome.

REWARDS erode intrinsic motivation, because the child does not have the opportunity to develop an interest or liking in the activity on its own merits. Children are denied the opportunity to make a genuine contribution, the foundation for feeling responsible and capable (belonging and significance).

REWARDS de-value or degrade the task or action needed, as the “reward” is presented as more important.

REWARDS create dependency upon an outside person for approval rather than a conscientious evaluation by the child of her own efforts.

# AN ALTERNATIVE: FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS TOGETHER ***WITH*** YOUR CHILD!

Prepared by Lois Ingber, L.C.S.W. Sources: “Positive Discipline” by Jane Nelsen and “Unconditional Parenting” and “Punished by Rewards” by Alfie Kohn.