

# Supporting Your Child Through Change

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Change is challenging, and as your child adjusts to the plan, you may notice shifts in their behavior. Whether they adapt quickly or need more time, using positive reinforcement is a powerful way to help them build resilience and learn new skills.

## What are we rewarding?

We aren't looking for "perfect" behavior or a lack of anxiety. We want to reward coping, persistence, and engagement.

- **Brave Behavior:** Look for moments where they stay in their own bed, ask fewer reassurance questions, or take a small social risk like ordering their own food.
- **The Act of Coping:** Even if your child is unhappy, anxious, or vocal about their discomfort, the fact that they "got through it" is a win.
- **Progress Over Perfection:** You can praise them for finishing a task even if it was difficult and they didn't do it with a smile.

## How to Reinforce Effectively

Reinforcement doesn't have to be grand to be meaningful. Focus on consistency and authenticity.

- **Authentic Praise:** Avoid "You did that perfectly." Instead, try: "That was really hard for you, but you got through it. I'm proud of your effort."
- **Small & Frequent:** Use small prizes, stickers, or special activities (e.g., a scavenger hunt during your daily family walk, choosing music for the commute to school the next day). These are easier to give consistently than larger, end-of-process rewards.
- **External Support:** Praise can mean a lot coming from someone outside the family, too. Ask a trusted relative or friend to send a quick text or call to tell your child they are proud of them.

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## Reinforcement vs. Bribery

A common question is how to tell the difference between rewards and "bribes." There are a few key differences:

Bribery: The Cycle to Avoid	Reinforcement: The Goal
Offered during a tantrum or misbehavior to make it stop.	Offered after a positive behavior or effort to encourage it to happen again.
Teaches the child that acting out is how they "earn" rewards.	Teaches the child that their hard work and coping skills are noticed.
Focuses on stopping a behavior.	Focuses on starting and building a behavior.

## Key Takeaway

You are helping your child shape new habits. While rewards may eventually fade out, they are essential "scaffolding" while your child is learning to do things that aren't yet easy or naturally motivating for them.

Remember: You aren't rewarding the absence of anxiety; you are rewarding the act of coping (the fact that they "got through it" is a win).

## Home Practice

- **Continue following your plan**, and include any updates made today (e.g., adding rewards).
- **Continue charting rescues.**