

# EMOTION REGULATION TRAINING

The first thing that needs to change is how you think about your role as a parent. Unfortunately, you learned how to parent from your parents, who learned from their parents, who learned from their parents, who learned from... you get the picture. And unfortunately, 99% of parents parent through the use of fear (i.e. the Harm-Avoidance Drive). While this might work for some children, it will not work for all children, and specifically, it will definitely not work for children who have no fear or, to put it simply, are not afraid of you. Back in the old days when you were raised, there was something very real that our parents could use to motivate us to behave the way they wanted us to (i.e. control our behaviour) – physical pain! You are not allowed to do that anymore. And really, you don't ever need to if you know how to use the other drive (Pleasure-Seeking Drive) to motivate. Unfortunately though, you were never taught how to parent any other way.

This step-by-step program teaches you how to do it the other way, using pleasure and fun and 'want' to motivate their behaviour. This will teach you how to parent (control behaviour) by using the same principles and strategies that some complete stranger uses to motivate you to take 8 hours out of your day, 5 days of the week, and follow their instructions willingly. This will teach you how to reward them for doing what you want them to do. Now, if you are thinking right now "*Tried that, it didn't work!*" bear with me for a couple more pages. The problem that you ran into previously is that you didn't understand how to activate the Pleasure-Seeking Drive properly. If you read the chapter on the Pleasure-Seeking Drive, you will understand it better. If you haven't yet, that's fine. Trust me. This will fix the problems you are having. You will start to see changes in their behaviour by the second or third day of doing this. As I stated in the introduction to the book, **I guarantee that if you follow this program step by step and do exactly what it says, it will work in 100% of kids, 100% of the time. I have never seen this program fail to work when done properly!**

The important thing to remember is that it is critical to activate the Pleasure-Seeking Drive and make him want what you have while giving him a clearly defined way of getting it. Do you remember what it takes to activate the Pleasure-Seeking Drive, Jim?

## **Think about the characteristics of how Jim works:**

1. Jim wants what he likes. The reward has to be something that he wants.
2. He is very short sighted and needs to be fed every day. The reward has to be something that they can get every single day!
3. Everything in his list of *Good Stuff* is interchangeable. You have to limit how much *fun* they have if you want them to want your reward. Just like you would have to limit how much snacking they could do on junk food (=fun) after coming home from school if you want them to be hungry for *your* dinner (=reward).
4. He only cares about what he does not have yet. The reward has to be something that they cannot get or access without your permission and it cannot be something that they consider theirs.

Each of those characteristics of the Pleasure-Seeking Drive has several practical implications when it comes to choosing the rewards and figuring out how those rewards are then paid out. If you don't know what those are, then it leaves the possibility that your children will find a way around you to still get what they want **without** doing their job (what you want them to do). After the step-by-step implementation

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guide, there is a point form list of things to make sure you do in order to close all of those possible loopholes that kids use to get around their parents. Closing these loopholes is critical to making the program work. If you close all of the loopholes and follow the program strictly, then it is guaranteed to work. I recognize that doing everything on that list requires a lot of effort on your part as the parent. While not every child needs to have the program run as strictly as I am going to outline, **IF** you find that it is not working, then you need to go back to that list of things you have to do and make sure you are doing all of them. The **only** reason for this program not working is that they are finding a way around you and still getting *Good Stuff*.

While this program can be used with any child to target any behaviour, there is one group of kids for which it is the **only** thing that will work to control their behaviour. This is the group of kids who have very quiet Harm-Avoidance Drives (no fear). These are generally the kids with significant, long-standing behavioural problems and emotion-regulation difficulties (problems controlling their temper). These kids are the oppositional, defiant, strong-willed children who always want to do what they want to do, do not listen, fly into a rage when they are told 'NO', blame everyone else and never accept responsibility for what they do. They get angry in an instant over nothing, rapidly shifting from angry to normal and back again, sometimes within minutes. If you have one of these kids, this is the only thing that is going to make a difference in their behaviour. This program was designed to teach these children how to regulate their emotions and to give parents some tools that they could use to control their children's behaviour.

The success of this program depends entirely on using rewards to motivate the child to do what you want them to do. **Finding the right reward for the individual child is CRITICAL!** When this program is properly implemented, because you are activating the Pleasure-Seeking Drive (the part of their brain that they cannot control), they will have no choice but to do what you want them to do because their Pleasure-Seeking Drive will make them do it... whether they like it or not. In other words, because they are so driven to get what they want, all the time, no matter what it takes, when you control what they want and spell out exactly what they need to do to get it, their Pleasure-Seeking Drive will push them to do whatever it takes to get it, no matter what. Now, if the only way to get it is to follow the rules, to do what you want them to do, to behave a certain way, then they will do exactly that because that is what is going to get them what they want.

Let's consider an example where video games or other electronics are a very rewarding thing for a child and they absolutely love them. In order to set up the program using electronics as the reward, the first thing that you need to do is to decide on the maximum amount of electronics that you would be comfortable allowing the child to use every day, assuming that they have done everything that they are supposed to do that day. You can use whatever amount you're comfortable with.<sup>1</sup> This is the 'Total Daily Reward' or TDR.

The first thing that you need to do is to give them a small portion of the TDR (about 10%) to them for free. Every single day, no questions asked, no matter how good or bad they have been. You need to give it to them for free in order to keep them hooked on it, because if they forget how much they like it,

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<sup>1</sup> (FYI – most professional pediatric organizations around the world have recommended a total daily limit of 2 hours of electronic use per day for children under the age of 12 and a 3-hour limit for teenagers).

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then it is no longer useful as a reward. For example, if the TDR is 2 hour per night, then they are given 15 minutes for free. This will leave you with 105 minutes of electronics to use as rewards to motivate them to do their job. It is very important for the child to know and understand that other than their 'freebie' time, they will never be able to use those electronics **unless they have earned it first!** AND every day, there will be ways that they can earn them (by doing the 'job' you want them to do), up to the TDR.

Now let's talk about those 'jobs'. If you want them to **do** something – like chores or homework – then you need to reward each specific task, each time they do it. For example, they can earn five minutes for cleaning their room, two minutes for doing the dishes, three minutes for doing homework, etc. If you want them to **stop doing** something – like throwing temper tantrums, hitting their siblings, swearing or yelling – then the 'job' is having successfully controlled that negative behaviour for a set period of time. Break up their day into **observable** time blocks – chunks of time that you are able to monitor to confirm that they have 'done their job' then break up the TDR into an equal amount of smaller, per-block rewards and tie the two together. Set a repeating timer for the time block chose and start it when you are able to start observing their behaviour. At the end of each hour, the timer will go off and that is your cue to go to them and pay them for their job-well-done. If they do not succeed and part-way through a time-block, they fail at their job, you simply make a point of resetting the timer in front of them so that they can restart their job and try again. Whenever possible, try to make the 'job description' something that *have to do* (which would automatically be incompatible with the behaviour that you want them to stop doing) rather than something that they have to think about *not doing*. For example, they can earn 10 minutes of electronics for every hour that they can "talk in a calm and respectful manner, at an indoor volume" rather than "not yell and scream".

If their 'job' is something that you want them **to do**, I recommend using the 'one reminder' rule: you can remind them **once** (at most) about what they need to do in order to earn the reward. After that, if they continue not doing the job, then they did not earn that portion of the TDR. There is no second reminder and there is no nagging. If their 'job' is something that that you want them to **stop doing**, then you can provide the reminder if they are about to fail at their job, but not if they already have (i.e. when they are getting louder and more agitated, but haven't already yelled or swore). If you are using blocks of time, also tell them how much time is remaining until they have successfully finished the block.

As the rewards are earned, they are added onto the 'free' amount and then they are paid out at the end of the day, **every single day**. They need to be **told every time** that they have successfully earned any of the rewards and it **needs to be recorded** (with a bar chart, with numbers, with stickers, etc.) in a place where they can see it so that they can monitor their success (and, if they want, try to reach their own goals in terms of amount of rewards earned).

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## How to Choose Rewards

1. **Identify free rewards:**

Make a list of all of the things that your child likes that they currently get or have access to most of the time.

2. **Identify the possible rewards:**

Add to the list all of the things that your child likes that they do not get very often (if ever) but that they would love to be able to get.

3. **Eliminate uncontrollable rewards:**

Look over the list you just made and cross out (but do not erase) ones that you think would be impossible to control their access to as well as the ones that you do not want to control their access to. These would be ones that you think are important for them to have free access to like reading books, going out with friends, music, sports/outdoor pursuits, bedtime stories, etc.

4. **Identify the most suitable rewards:**

Circle the best 3 or 4 rewards that:

- a. You can easily control access to
- b. Can be given in a graduated / piece-by-piece manner (not all or none)
- c. Can be given to them every single day

5. **Pick how much you can pay:**

Decide on a maximum daily amount for each of the top 3 or 4 rewards and then break this up into the free part (about 10-15% of the total) and the earnable part.

6. **Identify and control all competing rewards (if necessary):**

Look over the list of rewards. Everything that is on that list is a possible competing reward and might need to be removed or controlled if the chosen rewards are not important enough to motivate your child. Competing rewards can also include uncontrolled access to the chosen rewards in other settings (i.e. Grandma allows them to watch TV at her house). Don't forget that **winning, beating you, driving you crazy, and making you react is an important competing reward** for most children. Not getting into arguments with them and acting like you don't care whether they do something or not is one of the few ways to control this competing reward.

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## How to Link the Reward to the Behaviour

1. **Identify the problem behaviours:**

Write down the things that they are doing that you want them to stop doing and the things that they are not doing that you want them to start doing. Be specific! For example, “Messy” can mean many things. Specifically write down what it means for *your* child → (i.e. “does not clean up their room, leaves dishes everywhere in the house, leaves towels on the bathroom floor.”) Don’t use general words that can mean a lot of things like “disrespectful,” “mean,” “rude,” “abusive,” “lazy,” etc.

2. **Eliminate unobservable behaviours:**

Look over the list and cross off the ones that you cannot observe or can’t know for sure whether or not it has happened. The most common ones that will be crossed off your list are things like lying and stealing. Other ones that might apply could be behaviours that happen at school or at home when you are not there.

3. **Choose the target behaviour(s) and establish a baseline:**

Pick one or two of the most important behaviours that are easily monitored (ones that you would see or be there to witness yourself) and write it down on a Behaviour Tracking Sheet like the one I have included in this book. If you are targeting an anxiety-driven behaviour, think about the behaviour and see if it can be further broken down into its component parts (i.e. “going downstairs” can be broken into as many parts as there are steps on the staircase).

Make a note of how bad or how often the target behaviour has been over the last two weeks. I suggest using a simple rating scale like the one I have included below. Other simple scales include rating it on a scale of 1-10 or simply counting how often something happens.

4. **Describe the job:**

**Write out** specifically what you want them do instead of the problem behaviour you are targeting. Once again, be very specific. For example, “Do not touch your sister or make anything touch her (i.e. throw something at her) without her permission,” or “Have your room clean [bed made, nothing on the floor, desk neat and tidy] by 6:00 pm every day.”

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## 5. **Pick a salary (payment schedule):**

Decide on how to tie the reward(s) you picked to the goal behaviour(s) and write out specific rules that clearly explain what they need to do and what they will get if they do it.

For example:

- a. "For every ½ hour that you are in the house and I do not hear you swear, you will earn \_\_\_\_\_."
- b. "For every 30 minutes that you are in the same house as your little brother and you do not yell at him or insult him, you will earn \_\_\_\_\_."
- c. "Every day that your room is clean [bed made, nothing on the floor, desk neat and tidy] by 6:00 pm, you will earn \_\_\_\_\_."

You will need to make sure that the rules are created so that they can earn more than 50% of the available reward relatively easily. If the job is too hard and they are not earning enough of the reward fairly quickly, they might decide that it isn't worth it.

This might mean that you have to shorten the time periods that you are monitoring (i.e. 10 minutes of TV for every 20 minutes without swearing in the house instead of 30 minutes of TV for every hour) or you might need to break down the behaviour even further into its component parts (i.e. instead of 15 minutes of TV for a clean room, break it down to 5 minutes of TV for a clean floor, 5 minutes for a tidy desk and 5 minutes for having the bed made).

## 6. **Explain to your child what their job is and what they will be paid for doing it:**

Let your child know what the rules are and explain the rules in detail, if necessary. Then, post the written rules somewhere they can see them. In the beginning, every morning, remind them of what they can earn and what they have to do to earn it. Once they clearly understand the rules, you won't have to do this anymore. The younger your child, the longer you will have to do this daily morning reminder.

If necessary, remind them once before they fail to earn the reward (i.e. when they are visibly starting to get upset with their brother but haven't yelled at them yet or 20 minutes before the deadline, etc.). There can be more than one reward and specific rewards can be tied to specific behaviours (such as rewarding homework and chores with TV time and rewarding the absence of fighting with a later bedtime).

## 7. **Start restricting their access to the rewards and start the program the next morning:**

Do what you need to do to take control of the reward (remove it, put a password on it, etc.), remove the possible interfering rewards if necessary and start tracking their behaviour and recording what they have earned (as soon as they have earned it is best) somewhere that is very visible to the child (right beside the rules is best).

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## 8. **FOLLOW THE RULES!**

You need to make sure that you are **absolutely strict** in following the rules you have made. For example, if you have chosen a ½ hour period for monitoring something, then get a watch that beeps every 30 minutes so that you can check to see if they succeeded. If you said that their room had to be clean by 6:00 pm or that they must have their lunches made and be ready to leave for school by 7:45 am, then pick one clock in the house to use as the 'official time' and have an alarm that goes off at 6:00 pm or 7:45 am. If they are ready at 7:46 am, then they have not earned it! **NEVER BEND THE RULES!**

## 9. **Track the target behaviour to make sure that the Program is working:**

After 2 weeks, rate how bad the target behaviour has been over the last week using the same method as before and then compare it to the baseline rating.

## 10. **Close all the loopholes (if necessary):** If it is not working, check to see which loophole they are using to get around you. Go over the list of things to do to close the loopholes and do whatever it is that you are not doing yet or not doing properly.

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## REWARDS

Reward = source of pleasure or fun – anything that they like to have or like to do.

Examples: TV, video game consoles, MP3 player, telephone/cell phone, bike, parties, concerts, sports or other activities, money/allowance, playing games, winning, cuddles at bedtime, your attention, driving you crazy, etc.)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

## PROBLEM BEHAVIOURS

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_

## TARGET BEHAVIOURS

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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## Baseline Ratings of the Target Behaviours

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BEHAVIOUR

WORST EVER \_\_\_\_\_ BEST EVER

(Rate behaviour based on the last 1-2 weeks)

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BEHAVIOUR

WORST EVER \_\_\_\_\_ BEST EVER

(Rate behaviour based on the last 1-2 weeks)

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## RULES

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## Target Behaviour Severity Ratings

(After you have implemented the program)

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BEHAVIOUR

WORST EVER \_\_\_\_\_ BEST EVER

(Rate behaviour based on the last week)

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BEHAVIOUR

WORST EVER \_\_\_\_\_ BEST EVER

(Rate behaviour based on the last week)

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## Critical Steps a.k.a. “How to Close the Loopholes”

- **The reward has to be something that they want.**  
The rewards will change over time as the child grows up and the things that they like begin to change. Also keep in mind that once they are getting something all the time, their Pleasure-Seeking Drive is going to stop wanting it because that's just the way he is.
- **Your control of the reward must be absolute!**  
The reward has to be something that you can have absolute control over. They must **only** be able to get the reward when they do their job. If you don't or can't have complete control over the reward and the removal of the reward (i.e. being able to turn off the TV when their time is up) then do not use it as a reward.
- **The only way to get it is to do their job.**  
They cannot be able to get it anywhere else or in any other way (i.e. steal it, get it from the neighbours, guilt it out of you, get it when you are not home, etc.) It must be earned before it is given and the only way to earn it is to follow the rules. You cannot 'loan' it to them or provide 'advances' on payments.
- **Pay them every day.**  
The reward must be paid out every single day, predictably, and ideally at a set time at the end of the day. If the child is younger (0- 8), then the reward may need to be given twice a day (i.e. once at noon for morning behaviours and once in the evening for afternoon behaviour).
- **Follow the rules!**  
When you pay them, you have to be strict about it. If they earned 14 minutes on the TV, then you set the timer to 14 minutes and when the timer goes off, the TV is turned off or the plug is pulled. If you let them have extra, you defeat yourself as they learn that they don't really have to work for the reward because they might actually get some just by telling you to wait a minute. You have to be rigid because if you bend, they will simply try to bend you more and more and more as time goes on and this will put them back in control and able to get what they want from you without having to do the job you want them to do.
- **Remove interfering rewards.**  
You need to control their access to competing or interfering rewards (sources of dopamine). If there are a lot of fun things for your child to do even if they do not do their jobs, then you are probably allowing stuff to interfere with them wanting your chosen rewards by providing a way for them to still get their 'Dopamine-fix'.
- **Don't react!**  
The biggest interfering source of Dopamine that stops this Program from working is the Dopamine your child gets from driving you crazy and controlling your emotions or behaviour. You need to

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stop that from happening. In order to do this effectively, you need to step out of the role of the parent (who is emotionally invested in their children's compliance and behaviour and who really wants them to follow the rules) and instead, become their 'boss'.

As their 'boss', you are going to establish rules that specify what needs to be done in order for them to get 'paid' (rewarded) for doing it. **As their 'boss', you don't care whether or not they follow the rules**, you don't insist on compliance, you simply make the rules to start with and then follow the rules when it comes time to 'pay' them. If they earned it, great – pay them. If they didn't, then you tell yourself, "Oh, well... No big deal. They'll have another chance to try again to earn it".

You cannot play the role of the "parent" who is emotionally invested in their behaviour and therefore, reacting emotionally when they do not do what they are supposed to do. For that group of children who get a lot of pleasure (Dopamine) from defeating us and controlling our emotions and reactions, **that, in and of itself, will be far more rewarding to them than any other reward out there.**

- **Be clear and as specific as you need to be. Write out the rules and post them.**

The rules (i.e. 'job requirements' and the 'payment') need to be set out before the program starts and they need to know how they can earn the rewards. WRITE OUT THE RULES AND POST THEM. Be extremely specific with the rules in terms of what you want (i.e. "if you load all of the dishes from dinner into the dishwasher, properly, by 6:30 pm, then you will be paid 6 minutes of TV time," or "One continuous hour of no temper tantrums [which includes any of the following: raising your voice in anger; throwing things; hitting things, people or pets; slamming doors;] between the hours of 7:00 am and 8:00 pm, every hour, on the hour and excluding the hours of 9:00 am until 3:00 pm while you are at school = Child receives 10 minutes of TV time).

- **The rules are the rules and they rule!**

If they have done what the rules say, then they have earned the reward. You cannot argue that they have not earned the reward if they followed the rules that are there and then they came up with an original way to bypass the rules or started a new behaviour that was not explicitly mentioned as something that they needed not to do to earn that reward.

If they discovered one of these loopholes, **AFTER** the fact, you will have to change the rules in order to close the loophole they found. Until it's on the list of rules, it isn't a rule. You have to obey the rules the same as they do.

- **Predict problems and specifically target them with a rule.**

For example, if you think that they will throw a fit when it comes time for you to turn off the TV, then have a rule that states that they can earn an extra \_\_\_\_ (reward) **for tomorrow** for not arguing when their time is up and the TV is turned off.

- **Keep them hooked:** They have to be given a little bit of the reward for free, every day. This makes sure that you have the attention of the Pleasure-Seeking Drive. They must be able to earn approximately 60 to 70% of the available reward within a week of starting the program. The 'job' has to be easy enough that they succeed in earning the payment more often than they fail to earn

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it. If they can get ~ 60% within the first week, they will gradually improve over the next few weeks to 100% of the possible reward being earned.

If they do not end up earning at least 60%, then you have to modify the program so that they can earn more than they miss out on earning. For example, if they cannot hold it together for 1 hour in order to earn 10 minutes of reward, then change the pay-out schedule so that you reward them with five minutes of TV for every 30 minute block, or 2½ minutes earned for every 15 minute block. Alternatively, you can break down the specified behaviour into its component parts so that rather than earning 10 minutes for 'not fighting', they can earn two minutes for not hitting, five minutes for not swearing and three minutes for not throwing things. **It is the percentage of the reward earned that is important, not the net amount of reward earned.**

Another way that you can alter the program is to increase the value of the reward... *but only to an amount that you are OK with* – and do not overpay for a behaviour you want. If it's urgent and you need it done now, then you might have to overpay to get it done. But if it isn't, then simply wait until they are bored enough to do what you want for the salary you are offering. They will come around if there are no other interfering rewards available.

- **Keep count and keep them in the loop.**

Each time they earn a reward, they need to be told about it and it must be recorded, perhaps by using a chart or white-board on the fridge). You always want them to know exactly how much they have earned. They need to be able to see what they are earning as often as possible to maintain the Pleasure-Seeking Drive's focus. This also allows them to decide on how much they want to earn and to set goals for themselves. If you have more than one child, it will also be extra helpful because you will tap into the Pleasure-Seeking Drive's desire to win and beat their brother or sister – and wouldn't you know it... the only way to do that is for them to be better -and follow the rules better - than their brother/sister.

- **Do not punish by taking away what they have earned.**

If they have earned a reward, it cannot be taken away from them as a consequence for negative behaviour. If they could lose all of the benefit of their hard work with one screw-up, then why bother trying in the first place since they know they will screw-up eventually. However, if it's protected, they can and will try to get to specific levels of earnings knowing that they cannot lose it no matter what.

- **Start slowly.**

Only choose 1-2 important behaviours to target first. Parenting in this manner is a change and will take some time to get used to, both for you as well as your child. If you start right off the bat trying to get everything under control, you will fail because you will not be able to keep up the pace of monitoring all of those things that you put on your list. Do not set yourself up to fail. Once the chosen behaviours are under control, **then** you can add other behaviours *on top of what they are already doing*. You expand the program by adding to what they have to do (the original task + something else to get the same reward or you can add to the 'pay' as the 'job' requirements increase) or by extending the time periods needed (the pay-out schedule).

- **Keep going. Don't stop!**

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Once it is working, you will need to continue to do this for as long as you want the behaviour to be controlled. If you stop controlling their access to rewards and start letting them have them for free again, then their behaviour will go back to the way it was. Think about it this way; if your boss came to you one day and said “You know what? I’ve been thinking that you have been doing such an excellent job working for me these last few years that I have decided not to pay you anymore!” ... Get it?

In the long run, behaviour can be monitored on a once weekly basis and the reward can be having access to the rewards in an uncontrolled (but monitored) fashion. For example, when they become teenagers, the rule might be: “In order to earn the privilege of having a TV in your room for the following week, in the preceding week, you need to have all of your homework done on a nightly basis, show respect toward your parents by obeying them and not fighting with them, not have more than one ‘argument’ with your brother (you can disagree or raise your voice but cannot yell, throw things or make any unwanted physical contact) and complete all of your chores a minimum of 6 days out of the week with no more than one missed day of chores each calendar month.”

- **Always tie unplanned rewards to their behaviour.**

If you are planning on giving them something for free (i.e. they ask to go to the movies and you are totally fine with that), make sure that you make it clear to them that they can do this because of something good they have been doing (i.e. Child: “Mom... can I go to the movies with Julie?” Mom: “You know what, you have been doing so well at [school/homework/getting along with your sister/helping out around the house/cleaning up after yourself/using your manners/etc.] you’ve earned it! Have fun!”).

Feel free to give random bonuses for exceptional things or unexpected pleasant surprises. Do not make these bonuses predictable and make it clear that this is a bonus for a specific behaviour that you really liked. For example, if they shared their ice cream with their brother out of their own free will – quickly reward them with something (such as verbal praise if they like that or an extra 5 minutes of TV if they prefer that).