

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: I have a 3rd grader who is unbothered by any punishment we seem to impose. We take away play dates, i-pod etc., yet it makes no difference. I can't think of anything else that might help her learn from her poor choices. Any suggestions?

ANSWER: Without knowing much about your daughter, I have to answer in generalities. Generally, reward works better at eliminating undesirable behaviors than punishment. Punishment is initially effective when the behavior is new. When a behavior is entrenched, rewards tend to be more effective.

Sit down with your daughter (and husband too) and say something like this: "We love you so much and don't want to spend so much time punishing you for poor choices. We know you don't like the punishments either. Let's come up with some rewards that you can earn by making good choices." Notice how you become the "good guy" (the reward giver), instead of always being the "bad guy" (the enforcer).

By involving your daughter in the set-up and in choosing what rewards (within reason) will motivate her, there is a better chance the program will succeed because she is invested in it. Being a 3rd grader, the rewards will have to be frequent (once or twice a day), small (you can't afford big rewards that often), cumulative (adding up to something big), and consistent (to effectively link the new behavior and the reward). You might want to create a calendar or chart so she can follow her progress. Remember to watch for **progress** not instantaneous change.

Often, rewards can be as simple as time with you and dad reading, playing games, going for walks, baking cookies etc. Sometimes, earning "stars" or "points" toward a big-

ticket item works well too. Don't forget to **celebrate** the successes and even the progress. Also, remember that God is holding out an opportunity for you as parents to seek him in prayer and scripture. Kids are opportunities for parents to depend on God in deeper ways. Don't be content to just eliminate certain behaviors; God wants more from you! Fixing the problem without movement toward God misses the spiritual growth opportunity.

PS: If your daughter is truly strong-willed, remember that for her "winning" is more important than avoiding negative consequences (punishment). Strong-willed children are handled somewhat differently—see *Jack's Corner* on the strong-willed child on the sothfamily.org web site.

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