

# Family Behavioral Chart Program

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This program is an excerpt from *The Art of Empowered Parenting: The Manual You Wish Your Kids Came With*

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## **Comprehensive Behavioral Program**

### ***Introduction***

This behavioral chart is part of a comprehensive program that can be custom designed for the whole family. Before starting any behavior program it is very important that there be a dedication to seeing it through from start to finish. The most important stage of the program is in the time taken to set up the program. If you don't start by thinking thoroughly for the issues, difficulties, and problems that may arise when instituting such a program, you may run into many problems that may result in a feeling that the program was a failure, when it could prove to be a very powerful success for everyone involved.

While this chart was developed with ADHD children in mind, it is more than appropriate for all children and families, as well as adults. Although the rewards and consequences may change with age, the program can be used and reused throughout one's life. An interesting fact is that people who follow lists and write down goals are 80 percent more likely to complete those tasks and goals than those who do not write them down. The idea of this task lists is to help you and your family or classroom to develop skills that will help you all to be organized in the present and maintain organization skills that will last a lifetime. While I'm a common refer to developing the task list with the family, it is also very appropriate to develop with a classroom.

### ***Why the whole family?***

In order to communicate a sense of equity, to decrease conflict, and in order to provide a good model for your children or students, it is very important to be willing follow the same program that you're asking them to follow. If not, they may feel that they are being treated unfairly and may spend more time arguing and trying to break the system instead of letting it work and finding the benefits of such a system. Too many times our children feel that we may be hypocritical with things we are asking them to do when we are not willing to do the same things that we are asking them to do. Many times when I have instituted programs with the whole family and the parents have cooperated and participated in the program, the parents have often returned to state that they found a program helpful, and they realized, in retrospect, how disorganized they had been, which had contributed to the disorganization of their children. We, as parents, have to be willing to accept our responsibility in our children's issues, and therefore it is important that we be willing to make the efforts to help us grow and learn, as individuals, so that they can grow and learn.

### ***Generating the list of tasks***

It is important to have a comprehensive list of tasks in behavioral program, because those following the list will likely complete tasks on the list with the expectation that the list is exhaustive. Generating the list of tasks can be done either with the whole family or can be first done by the parents and followed up with the rest of the family. It is very important to have the entire family participate in the generation of the task list so that they feel that they had some say and were considered in this process. Your children's feeling of empowerment from the start is a key to the success of this program.

In generating the task list, it may be a good idea to review the day or week and ask yourself all the tasks that you and your family may do, from as little as packing a book bag, to as significant as going to work or paying bills. When you brainstorm and list all the activities, you may find that you will eliminate some, but may also add others.

The other important issue in making a list of tasks is considering tasks that may be more complex. The complexity of tasks depends on the interpretation of the task by the individual as well as the number of steps it takes to complete a task. For example if you think about cleaning a bedroom, there are many steps involved, from picking up clothes and stripping in making beds to vacuuming and emptying trash cans. For many children with organizational skills, telling them to clean their room can be an overwhelming task that may set them up for feeling failure instead of success. It is important to break down tasks that may be considered complex into simple steps that can be completed and checked off one at a time. Completing homework assignments and cleaning a bedroom or even doing the dishes may be examples of tasks they could be broken down into simpler tasks.

The next step is to define the task from completion to end. This is different than breaking down complex tasks into simple ones, because the complex tasks are written on the chart, whereas the definition of tasks is written on a separate sheet to be referred to if necessary. Defining the task involves writing down directions in steps that are to be followed to obtain a checkmark for the completion of the task. For example vacuuming the floor involves:

1. Taking a vacuum cleaner out of the closet into the room to be vacuumed
2. Vacuuming the entire floor in orderly fashion, almost as if cutting the lawn
3. Moving furniture and vacuuming underneath and behind the furniture (if necessary) and returning the furniture to where it had been
4. Wrapping up the vacuum cleaner cord in returning into the closet.

The reason for such detail is that children are infamous for doing only part the job and wanting all the credit. If there is a direction sheet that can be referred to, then it decreases the chance for arguments. When directions are typed out, all family members sign off on the directions, which then indicate that there is an understanding and contractual agreement as to how to complete the task to obtain a checkmark for completion.

### ***Listing the tasks***

After you generated listed tasks, is important to now put them in order in which the tasks will be completed throughout the day. If the task is to be completed more than once a day, such as brushing teeth, it should be put on the chart as many times as the person supposed to complete the task and in the order that the task should be completed throughout the day. In the example of brushing teeth, it is often one of the first and last things done in a day.

There will be some tasks that will not be performed every day, but on the days that they are performed, it is important to list them in the position that they would be completed, if you are using a weekly task list rather than a daily task list.

If you are having a child as young as three or four and up to the age of seven or eight use the task list, you may want to consider using pictures in place of or also next to the written task. The pictures will help the child to understand what the task is without having to keep asking for help.

The idea with using recognizable pictures to indicate tasks is to begin to help build a sense of independence and self-confidence in the child, as well as to decrease the chance of developing a dependency on others for instructions or advice.

Children often blossom and feel very empowered when they recognize that they are able to do things on their own. It gives them many more opportunities to believe in themselves. If you are going to use pictures instead of or included with words, you want to take a picture of the child doing the task with a smile or while enjoying the task. Having a picture of them enjoying the task will communicate to them that they enjoy completing the task.

### ***Time Limits on Tasks***

Some tasks that are done, need to be done by a certain time, or the purpose is lost. For example, if someone has to brush their teeth twice in a day, then technically they may wait until the evening and do it twice and mark the task completed. Also, kids are famous for putting things off until the last minute, and you may find them rushing around the house trying to get things done before they go to bed. This is probably not a good idea.

In order to prevent this from happening, it is possible to put a time for a task to be completed next to the task. In setting a time, it would be important to think about the latest time to complete a task, given weekday, versus weekend, summer versus school year. Make the limit reasonable, but not too reasonable that they can put the task off too long.

### ***Daily vs. weekly task list***

It is often an individual preference or judgment call as to whether or not to use a daily task list or a weekly task list. The other option is to have a master chart that everyone can refer to that is in a central location in the house that people can check off their tasks on. But if this is the case, often people have to return to the task lists to remember what they need to do, if they do not have one with them. If there is a computer in the home, it is often easy to create a file for the week or for each day a week and then to print out the task lists either weekly or daily.

Each person is responsible for carrying his or her list with him or her. If the list is lost, it is each person's responsibility, unless it can be proven that someone else did something with the list to destroy it or cause them to lose it. In some very competitive family environments, it cannot be ruled out that one child or another may try to hide or destroy another sibling's task list, so that they can be seen as doing better or "winning the game of getting positive attention". If this is the case, this is a definite power issue to be discussed and resolved.

A daily list can be helpful to decrease the potential visual interference of other tasks that may not need to be completed on that day. However a weekly task can be helpful because the child learns to develop the habit of carrying that list with them, checking off the tasks as they go along, and being able to give them a visual reference to their success to that point in the day and/or the tasks or challenges that lay ahead of them.

If you have a master task list, as well as on the progress chart, you will want to mark each person with a different color (or different stickers) so that it can be easily noted who has completed what tasks. You may want to let each person choose their colors so that they feel more invested in the program.

### ***How long we have to do this?***

This is a 10-week program that is recycled every 10-week period. Each 10 weeks the family starts over, fresh. In the first 10-weeks, the goal is to gradually build the confidence levels in completion levels to get the rewards. In order to receive the 10-week reward, participants have to reach the weekly goals on 8 out of 10 weeks. If you referred to the chart below, you'll notice that in the last column on the bottom chart it is labeled performance levels. The performance levels to give guidelines passed to the percentage of tasks to be completed and the number of days to reach the day the rewards to obtain a weekly reward. After the first 10-week period is completed, the program is started over, but the performance levels are maintained at 95 percent of tasks completed in a day and 6 out of 7 days that the task completion percentage is reached.

A critical part of the program is that the participants must successfully complete the tenth week in order to earn the 10-week reward. The reason for this is to make sure that they are completing the program successfully. This stipulation is in place so that the participants cannot manipulate the program by finishing the last week and still receive the larger 10-week reward.

The program is built on a combination of short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term rewards. One of the difficulties with most children, but especially ADD children, is that they have difficulty delaying gratification. The idea of having long-term rewards teaches them that it takes time to work for some goals that are attainable with persistence, dedication, and self-discipline. Once they begin to learn this, they will hopefully internalize that and continue develop productive attitudes and beliefs that will last them a lifetime.

I can only speak from experience in situations where a family began the program and completed the first 10-weeks, finding it to be a success. They then felt they didn't need the program any longer and later regretted the decision of stopping it. It does take time, energy and effort to follow such a program. But remember the long-term goals of the program, that you are teaching your children skills that will last a lifetime. The short-term benefit is that it will make your life much easier in the present. For example, consider the amount of time it takes you to ask your children to complete a task, check to see the task is done, ask your child again to complete the task, see the task is done, ask your child one more time to complete the task... you get the idea. This takes a great deal of time out of the parent or teacher's day and can add a lot of stress that is unnecessary. In terms of the time taken to initially set up the program, keep track of the first weeks of starting it, and periodically checking the chart, the time will balance out the most likely be much less time spent than if you did it the old-fashioned way.

### ***Building confidence***

As was discussed in the last section, the behavioral program starts at easily obtainable levels to reach success. As confidence is built in the ability for the participants to see that they are able to get the rewards, the performance levels are gradually increased. Once again, please observe the changes in the performance levels on the second chart (below), which is the progress chart.

When performance levels in a behavioral program are started out at too high a level, the chances for failure increase, which means that the participants may quit, because they do not want to feel failure that they can't do it. Fifty-five percent as a starting point is often an easily reached goal. Remember that you are working towards long-term success, not immediate compliance. Many of us as we get older often want too much too fast and need to remember that our children learn to walk first by crawling and then taking one step a time.

Many times parents are hesitant to start at 55% because it seems too easy and believe that the kids can manipulate the program. This may be true in some instances, but what I have observed is that when the family is doing the program together, the children often end up competing with each other and complete most of the tasks, rather than only completing enough tasks to get the rewards. If the kids do feel the need to be so manipulative to only complete the number of tasks requested, then that may indicate more significant issues that go beyond the behavioral plan.

You'll also notice on the performance levels that I never ask for 100 percent of tasks completed or 7 out of 7 days that they've reach their goals. I feel that it is important to allow for one task to be missed and for people to have one rough day in a week. I don't expect perfection, nor do I think it is wise to ask for that from anyone. We are all human, and make mistakes. It is critical to remember that.

There is a situation in which someone may complete tasks and not get credit for the day. This occurs if a participant does not complete the same task two days in row. If the person does not pick their clothes up, for example, or does not vacuum or complete tasks on two consecutive days, then no matter what else they did, they do not get the day the reward. The reason for this is that someone could select a task that they just didn't want to do but still get the rewards for the program. This type of manipulation should be avoided and therefore consequences are in place to keep this from happening.

## **Rewards**

As was stated, this program involves using short-term, intermediate, and long-term rewards. Short-term rewards for young children can occur even when they are checking off the tasks as they go through the day. Young children love to see their accomplishments being recognized. However for most, short-term rewards are recognized when the daily goals are met. Daily rewards may be earning the privilege to play outside, watch TV, play video games... Many times these rewards are delivered the following day, because they would not complete their last task often until they go to bed.

Weekly rewards are more intermediate-term rewards and may involve anything from having a friend over on the weekend, renting a video game, or even earning a weekly allowance. It is important to take the child's inputs into account in choosing all rewards, because if the rewards have no meaning to the person, then they will not have the motivation to complete the tasks. If there is a weekly allowance involved, it may be something that you want to keep in place throughout the program. However if the reward is having a friend over, renting a video game, or renting a movie, then it may be something that is decided each week. This should be decided on a case-by-case basis, but with some consistency. The 10-week reward is something that they are willing to work for, and at some level, is worth waiting for. It can be anything from a CD to a video game, or even a season pass or trip to an amusement park. Once again, it is very important to select a reward that has some importance to the child, or they may have no motivation to complete the program.

It is very important to select the daily, weekly, and 10-week rewards before the program starts so that each person knows what goal is that they are working toward. Imagine if you were working in a job and your boss did not tell you how much you were going to get paid before you started the job. Would you have the motivation to do the job to the best of your ability?

Another issue with rewards involves intrinsic vs. extrinsic rewards. The idea of intrinsic rewards is that someone is motivated internally to do something and they feel that is rewarding to them emotionally in some way. An extrinsic reward is when someone needs an external reward either by verbal feedback or something given to them in order to motivate them to complete a task or perform a behavior. When teaching people, as well as when teaching any other animal behaviors, it is important to start with extrinsic rewards and move towards intrinsic rewards. If someone never internalizes that there is a reward of feeling satisfaction, accomplishment, or confidence in completing a task, then they will always be looking for some type of external “carrot” to be dangled in front of them to do anything. It is common that parents will discuss with me that they feel that they cannot get their children to do anything if there is not some type of payment or reward. This often develops because the children were able to figure out that if they did not complete a task long enough, then their parents would offer something if they finally did complete the task. This is easy pattern fall into, but can be very detrimental to all involved, especially to the child, who may carry the need for extrinsic motivations with them throughout their life.

### ***When should I check the task lists?***

Parents often feel that they have to continually check up on their kids to make sure that things are getting down. Many times this is true, because children and adults sometimes like to get out of doing difficult things, especially if there's something more fun that they could do. They will often be willing to take the consequences later on in order to have fun or avoid pain in the present. However, this is not logical to many parents, because they have learned, as adults, that the task still needs to be done regardless of when it is done, and is more painful to wait until later. Remember that children do not have the same cognitive or mental capacities that adults do, and therefore they don't think the same way. Their learning will come in time and with repeated lessons. Lecturing and yelling do not often teach children the lessons; they need to learn them for themselves.

There are different approaches to checking up on task completion. It can be done every day, which can become labor-intensive and can feel very frustrating; it can be done on certain days of the week, but then participants may learn to finish their tasks only on those days; it can be done on a surprise basis, which can often involve the children playing the victim and feeling angry with the parent for checking task completion unannounced. There is the suggestion that I have to help decide when to check the task lists and completion of tasks.

This suggestion involves using a dice and letting the roll of the dice decide when to check the tasks. Perhaps after dinner or in the evening you ask one of the children or participants (or maybe take turns) to roll the dice. When they roll the dice, you have preselected numbers, in which if those numbers are rolled then you will check the tasks. The purpose of having them roll the dice, or letting the task checking be decided by chance, takes away the chance of feeling victimized or a perception of a conspiracy against them. The roll of the dice lets it be left up to chance whether or not to check the tasks and is an impartial way to make a decision.

If the tasks are not being followed, or are being done incompletely, then **anyone** has the right to call an audit. An audit involves having a few of the participants check up on tasks of anyone, including parents or teacher, to insure that the tasks are being completed correctly and completely.

It is important that audits not be called too often or when someone is trying to get even with somebody else, because then the audit becomes a weapon, not a tool. It may be important to discuss why the audit is being called to make sure that there is sound judgment in the audit. In the event that it is found that the audit is called unfairly, then it may be wise to institute an essay-writing consequence for the person who called it so that the person can think through why they did what they did and why was not a good idea.

### ***To swap or not to swap***

With some tasks such as sweeping floors, cleaning counters, vacuuming, dusting... it may be appealing to have family members swap those tasks so that the chance for boredom and monotony is decreased. It is recommended that task swapping occur, perhaps on a five-week basis so that each person develops a pattern of getting used to completing the task, but also, since the task list is a 10-week program, the tasks will be switched only once, which will decrease confusion. Task swapping is a judgment call it may be something that could be reviewed as the program continues to evolve.

### ***Minus Points***

At the bottom of the sample task list, you'll notice that there are three minus points. Minus points offer an alternative way to help your child to comply with demands in a timeout situation. Often when parents will tell the child to go to timeout or if you are using the *123-Magic* program and reached 3, the child will not go to timeout. The parent may end up yelling, pushing, or carrying the child to timeout, or may just give up, and the child feels that they have won the battle in some way. This is a common power struggle that occurs between parents and child, when both get hooked into a win-lose scenario. In order to prevent that from happening, minus points are recorded on the chart.

A minus point is used when the child has been given an opportunity to follow a command with approximately five seconds to follow through, but they have chosen to not comply. If they choose not to comply, then you let them know that they have earned a minus point and either mark it on their sheet at that time or write it down to mark later, so that they know there is an immediate consequence. If they continue to not comply after another five seconds, then you mark another minus point. If you mark more than three minus points, the fourth minus point is marked on the next day. If you mark more than six minus points, the seventh minus point is marked on the day after. What the child learns is that their behaviors today may affect them tomorrow and into the future. While they may not be invested in learning this lesson at the moment of resistance, it may be something to discuss with them after the situation has died down.

It may be a good idea to put a limit on the number of minus points earned at one time, perhaps 9, because sometimes when children and adults get stuck in emotions, they are not thinking logically. Additionally many children will try to break the program and figure out all the reasons why it's not going to work so that they can try to control situation. If the child does not comply after the ninth minus point, then it may be a good idea to institute an essay writing consequence. If a parent and child, or teacher and child, become embroiled in a power struggle, it is very important that the parent consider their voice tone, their actions, and their behaviors that contributed to and/or maintained the conflict.

## Summary

The most challenging part of change is taking the first step. This is a program that may take some time to set up, and to do it well, should be entered into seriously. Keep in mind that the end goal is more structure for you and your children and more harmony in the family. If you are willing to participate in the program, you will likely find that your life may run a little smoother. Know that it will take some time to adjust and be patient. The biggest issue I see with families that are having struggles is a lack of consistency, organization and follow through. I wish you much success and the best of luck.

## Sample Task Chart

Tasks	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Wake by Alarm or w/ one Notice							
Brush Teeth by 9:00 am							
Make Bed by 9:00 am							
Eat Breakfast							
Clean Breakfast Dish by 10:00 am							
Take Lunch & Books							
Clean Lunch Dish*							
Homework: Math English Spelling Reading...							
Afternoon Chores... by 6:00 am							
Clean Room: * Strip/Make Bed Pick-up/Sort Clothes into the sheets Clothes/ Sheets to Laundry Clean Desk Pick up Floor Dust / Vacuum Empty Trash							
Vacuuming* by 6:00 pm							
Dusting* by 6:00 pm							
Clear Table							
Clean Dishes							
Counters							
Sweep Kitchen Floor							
Pack Book Bag							
Pick up Clothes							
Brush Teeth							
Minus Point							
Minus Point							
Minus Point							
Day Total							

◆ Shaded areas note days to complete those tasks.

## 10 - Week Progress Chart

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Performance Levels
Week 1								<b>55% &amp; 4/7 days</b>
Week 2								<b>55% &amp; 4/7 days</b>
Week 3								<b>65% &amp; 5/7 days</b>
Week 4								<b>65% &amp; 5/7 days</b>
Week 5								<b>75% &amp; 6/7 days</b>
Week 6								<b>75% &amp; 6/7 days</b>
Week 7								<b>85% &amp; 6/7 days</b>
Week 8								<b>85% &amp; 6/7 days</b>
Week 9								<b>95% &amp; 6/7 days</b>
Week 10								<b>95% &amp; 6/7 days</b>