

# THE **POINT** PROGRAM

POINT  
your children  
in the right  
direction...

*by Pamela Roos, LCSW*

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# 1. Introduction

The primary goal of this "Behavior Modification Program" is to help children develop the habits and skills that they will need to become concerned, caring and responsible members of society. Although many positive and varied experiences are necessary for this goal to be realized, the POINT Program offers one important way of helping children which is enjoyable, positive in its approach, practical to use and effective in its results.

The heart of the program is a contract between parent and child to work on 3 personal goals in exchange for certain rewards.

In selecting goals, or "Target Behaviors", to be worked on it is important to choose one that offers the child a chance to be successful. Defer until later especially difficult problems. Keep in mind that a youngster, in order to please you, may agree to work on a problem that they are not really ready to tackle successfully. It is very important to work with me in order to choose realistic Target Behaviors.

Many of the families who begin this program feel negative and defeated. The POINT Program stresses the positive and will help to make some positive changes in your child if followed consistently in consultation with me. Now let's get started...

## 2. Choosing Target Behaviors

It will be helpful to review a Target Behaviors Listing together during our session. Always feel free to add a behavior which is not on the list. Be sure to discuss this to make sure you will be targeting a **realistic behavior** which is worded in a **positive** way.

It is also important for the child to have some input in to choosing the Targets as he/she will then be more motivated to work on these behaviors.

Three behaviors are usually recommended as this will provide a good balance of success and challenge for your child. **It is important for at least one of the Target Behaviors to be relatively easy** for the child to accomplish so that the child can immediately experience some success and be more motivated to continue.

It is important to choose realistic Target Behaviors. It will help if you think of each Target as a step toward achieving a goal. Most children do better when the goal is broken down into several steps which they are able to accomplish successfully. For example, consider the differences between some of the following:

# UNREALISTIC      REALISTIC

## 1. I will behave.

- I will respond to requests the first time
- I will listen when others speak.
- I will use a pleasant tone of voice.
- I will take turns.
- I will have a positive attitude.

## 2. I will be responsible

- I will keep my room clean.
- I will do my homework without prodding.
- I will hand in my homework each day.
- I will do my chores without reminders.
- I will pick up my possessions each day.

# NEGATIVE

# POSITIVE

3. I will not hit my sister/brother.

- I will keep my hands to myself.
- I will use words when I am angry.
- I will take a time out when I am angry.
- I will control my temper.
- I will ignore my sister's/brother's misbehavior.

The "negative" example tells the child what NOT to do vs. telling the child what TO DO.

**Target behaviors which are both specific and positive will be more useful and effective in producing positive results.**

## 3. Rewards

Sometimes parents have questions about the idea of giving rewards for behavior. You may wonder:

### ***Why should I have to bribe my child to behave?***

Let's talk about the difference between a bribe and a reward. A bribe is when you give someone something before they perform, with the expectation that they will perform in the desired way. Does this tactic usually work with children? No. A reward is something earned after the desired behavior. Does this usually work? Yes.

### ***Shouldn't my child be expected to behave without getting something in return?***

Yes. However, it can also prepare your child for the real world and help them to understand that when you do what you are supposed to do certain good things happen, and when you don't certain bad things happen. This is the way of the world. When an adult performs well at their job at work, they get to keep their job (usually!), get a paycheck, and may even get a promotion with a larger paycheck.

### ***What will happen when I stop rewarding them?***

The goal of this program is to get your child to behave without having to use the program. Your child will be gradually weaned from the program and you will find out more about this after we get started.

### ***How much money will these rewards cost?***

Rewards need not cost any money at all. Some of the most effective and meaningful rewards can be time spent playing a game, reading a book or working on a project with Mom or Dad. Other rewards which don't cost anything can be extra TV time, staying up 15 minutes later at night, watching a show with Mom or Dad, taking a walk with Mom or Dad, etc. Sometimes parents choose to give children an

allowance or an occasional small toy or trip to McDonald's and, if possible, these should be tied into the POINT program as a reward.

***What if I give my child these things anyway?***

The program will be most successful if you can incorporate as many privileges as possible into the program for points. However, there may be some things which are just not appropriate in your family value system to charge points for and that will be supported 100%!

***What about my other children? It's not fair to charge one child points and not the others.***

It is very common to start the other children in the house on the program before too long. However, it will be important to choose appropriate targets and rewards for the other children as well. Usually a half session set-up is all that is required and ongoing monitoring can be accomplished within the framework of already scheduled appointments. Remember, each of your children is an individual and needs their own individualized plan to maximize effectiveness.

***Are all rewards worth the same number of points?***

No. ideally, the child should be rewarded with a variety of choices to include some worth one point, for immediate gratification, and some worth 25 – 50 points to teach the value of short and long-term goal-setting.

***What is the most number of points we can charge?***

On occasion parents have charged as much as 500 points for a very expensive reward or one that is extremely demanding on the part of the parent or the family!

### ***What if we start out charging too few or too many points?***

Changes can be made. However, if a child has worked hard for a reward they should be able to earn it if at all possible. Hopefully, this situation can be avoided by discussing the point values thoroughly during a session and being conservative with point values when you start out. Remember- it is a lot easier to subtract how many points the child needs to earn for a reward than to add the points needed!

## **4. Bonus and Penalty Points**

If your child has tried hard, done something well or behaved in a way you are pleased with and if this behavior is not a Target Behavior, then they can earn a Bonus Point. Bonus Points are unlimited but should not be used indiscriminately. Be sure to let your child know which behavior they have received a Bonus Point for, and try to give the Bonus Point or tell them about it as soon after the desired behavior as possible.

If your child is engaging in a negative behavior, and if ignoring and modeling have not worked (Refer to Steps for Limit-Setting- next page), then it is appropriate for you to give a Penalty Point. Each point is worth minus 1 or minus 2 points at the end of the day. Penalty Points are also unlimited but should only be used as a last resort. Once again, be sure to first warn the child that if the behavior continues they will receive a Penalty Point, and be sure to follow through after one warning only if the negative behavior continues.

However, **no matter how many Penalty Points your child receives, at the end of the day their Daily Total can never be less than zero or less than they earned that day.** This is



because your child needs to begin each day with a “clean slate”. Otherwise, there is little motivation to do their best.

## 5. Steps for Limit-Setting

Following through on negative consequences to stop inappropriate behavior should be done in steps as soon as the behavior begins to occur.

### STEP 1: IGNORING AND MODELING

This technique allows you to ignore the acting-out child and to remind him of the rule indirectly, through praising another child.

In this step the parent does not talk directly to the acting-out child or attend to this behavior. Instead, your full attention is focused on those children who are behaving appropriately and you point out exactly what they are doing that is winning your attention.

*Examples:*

“Eddie, I like the way you are setting the table quietly.”

“Sue, you did a good job remembering to clean your room. I’m proud of you.”

“I can see that Lisa is ready to leave because she is sitting quietly.”

NO COMMENT IS MADE TO THE ACTING-OUT CHILD AT ALL.

Of course, not all behaviors can or should be ignored. Ignoring should not be used when aggressive or destructive behaviors are

being exhibited or when the child is being reinforced by the inappropriate activity itself, or by other children.

## STEP 2: QUIET REPRIMAND AND SPECIFICATION OF CONSEQUENCES

This technique involves softly spoken cues. You can **whisper** to your child to point out his/her inappropriate behavior or convey your disapproval through gestures and a **brief comment** which communicates, "That's not appropriate."

It is important that this reprimand be done quietly to allow the child to "save face" and to avoid head-on confrontation if possible.

**Be specific** about consequences to be applied if the misbehavior continues. State the consequences in a matter-of-fact way. **Don't threaten.**

Examples:

"If you continue to do that, you will lose a point today."

"If you don't stop that, you'll need to take a time-out."

And, most important of all, **don't threaten and not follow through.** For every time you do this, you make it that much more difficult for your child to understand what the limits are, making your job that much more difficult the next time- and there will be a next time.

This tends to be the most challenging for the primary caretaker because you may be so exhausted sometimes that it **appears** easier to give in to the child's test than to follow through. It is normal for all parents to feel this way sometimes. Just remember, if this is the case, then give in at Step 1, not at Step 2. **It is much better to ignore the entire misbehavior than to address it and not follow through.**

Because each specification of consequences will require **consistent action on your part** as a parent, **think before you say anything.**

## STEP 3: LOSS OF POINTS

If Step 2 fails to terminate the behavior, then an appropriate number of points should be deducted as soon as possible.

## STEP 4: TIME-OUT (ISOLATION)

If your child continues to act out after LOSS OF POINTS, he/she should be isolated **immediately** in a specified time-out area. Immediacy is extremely important when implementing time-out because by acting right away you can often stop a problem before it escalates to the point where your child is out of control or has involved other children in his acting out.

Tell him/her **briefly** why he/she is being placed in time-out and what he/she must do in order to return to the family. Examples:

*"You must stay in time-out ...*

*...until you calm down."*

*...until you are quiet."*

*...until you can drop the subject."*

*...for 15 minutes."*

*...until you can tell me what bad choice you made."*

There should be no attention from adults or children, no discussion, no communication whatsoever during time-out. **Only the parent directly involved** should talk to the child who is in time-out and then only at the end of the specified time.

The time out area should also be as free of destructive and self-destructive opportunities as possible. This will require some thought on your part.

## 6. Conclusion

Change is a difficult process. Hopefully, the POINT Program will give you some structure to begin the process of change.

If we work together change will begin to take place soon. To avoid problems and maximize effectiveness do not make any changes in the program outside of a session. Remember that I am available to help. When you have a question or concern, feel free to email or call me:

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# TARGET WORKSHEET

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

Date Began: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Mastered: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date Began: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Mastered: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date Began: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Mastered: \_\_\_\_\_

# REWARDS WORKSHEET

Small Points (1-3)

Medium Points (4-10)

Large Points (11-25)

X-Large Points (26+)

# WEEKLY POINT SHEET

Sunday Earned Spent Total

1.

2.

3.

Monday

1.

2.

3.

Tuesday

1.

2.

3.

Wednesday

1.

2.

3.

Thursday

1.

2.

3.

Friday

1.

2.

3.

Saturday

1.

2.

3.