

POINT SYSTEMS

Point systems are excellent ways to: 1.) organize jobs around the house, 2.) reduce arguing over who is supposed to do what, and 3.) increase cooperation. You can use Point Systems to improve the way people treat each other. Children get excited about them and will work harder than we thought possible to earn points.

The reason kids like Point Systems is that they get regular attention from you for improving. They also get extra privileges and things they want. They develop a sense of pride too, because parents are not scolding or shouting nearly so often. They feel more respected.

Advantages:

- *Children are very motivated to do jobs.*
- *It's an orderly way to keep track of jobs.*
- *Children develop a sense of responsibility and develop more mature behavior.*
- *You become more positive towards your children.*
- *It's a simple system for those under 10 years old and preteens (see Contracting for older children).*

HOW TO SET UP A POINT SYSTEM:

- 1.** Make a list of your childrens' behavior that you want more of (obeying, not talking back, remembering jobs, homework, getting along with brothers and sisters, and so on). Discuss these with them.
- 2.** Write down a list of rewards or incentives your children will want. Discuss these with them. Use family time spent together doing fun things as a reward as often as you can.
- 3.** Assign points for each behavior on the behavior list. The harder it is for your children to do a certain behavior, the more points you should give for it.
- 4.** Assign a certain number of points for each reward on your reward list.
- 5.** Make a chart with the days of the week listed across the top, the behavior to be improved listed down the left side, and the points needed to earn each reward listed on the bottom.
- 6.** Put the chart someplace (like the refrigerator) where everyone can see it.
- 7.** Announce that the system has started, and keep careful track of the behaviors on the chart and the points earned.
- 8.** Arrange certain times when points can be traded in for rewards.
- 9.** Every week or two, review the chart with your children and make changes as needed. You can add new behaviors, change the amount of points needed to earn the rewards, etc. Use this meeting to show genuine appreciation for their efforts.

HOW TO MAKE THE POINT SYSTEM WORK BEST:

Point systems are extremely effective if set up correctly. They should work better than anything you've tried before for getting better cooperation from your kids and reducing arguments. Follow the suggestions listed here to make a point system work for you!

Involve your children in the Point System. Get their ideas of what they think they need to improve. Also, ask them what they think they already do well (tell them if they don't know). Ask them how many points they think each behavior is worth (you will have to take the lead on this and make the final decisions). Ask them which rewards are most valuable to them (you can try assigning higher points to earn those).

If your children are not working to improve a certain behavior you have listed, one of these steps should solve the problem:

- Assign more points for doing the behavior.
- Be more specific about the behavior (for instance, "doing the dishes" means washing, drying, cleaning the counter, and putting food away). Talk with your children to set up a "job description" for each chore.
- Break the behavior down into smaller steps that you know they can do (for instance, "do your homework" might be broken down into four parts, each earning a point or two—writing down the assignment in school or getting it from a friend, bringing home the right books, spending 30 minutes working on it, and checking the work for mistakes and neatness).
- Talk to them about it. Make sure you or the children are keeping careful track of the behaviors and the points earned. If you don't check up on this chart daily, the kids will think you don't care about it, and their motivation will drop. If you have a really hard time marking down their points when they earn them, ask the kids to help you do this.
- Make the record keeping interesting for the kids. For younger children, stamps, stars, or stickers are exciting. For older kids, simple check marks or plus signs will do. You may need to remind them that good records will get them more privileges.
- Be careful not to assign so many points for rewards that the kids don't want to work for them. If they think that earning the reward will take too long and a lot of effort, they won't try for long. Also, be careful not to assign points that are so low that you are running yourself ragged keeping the kids supplied with the rewards they are earning. You need to balance their effort and improvement with your effort and rewards.
- Do not punish the kids by taking away points that they have already earned. Use another consequence (like an extra job) when necessary. Children will give up working hard at something if they think they will never earn it. It's up to you to make the point system work so that your kids succeed if they try.
- Whenever your kids earn points, be sure to praise them for it. Our approval is the most important thing for our children, even long after they are grown up. Let them know often how proud you are of them for their efforts and their improvements. Refer to the list of things you can say to children to praise them, in the Glossary.

- Praise is more effective when it is genuine, immediate, enthusiastic, verbal and nonverbal, specific, and frequent.
- Keep the chart current. When the kids have improved a particular behavior so that it has become a habit, you can drop it from the chart. Remember, however, to praise them every so often for continuing with this improvement. You can add new behaviors that you think are important to improve. Pick behaviors your children do or don't do that lead to your criticizing or yelling at them.
- Negative behaviors, like fighting with siblings, swearing, or disrespectful talking back, can be put on the chart in a different way. List the absence of these behaviors for a certain period of time as things for which they can earn points. For example, going for one hour without fighting is worth ____ points. Or, going all day without swearing is worth ____ points. A good rule is: if the negative behavior is frequent, allow a shorter period of time between rewards.

Examples

To give you an idea of how these point systems can be used to solve a lot of different problems quickly, we will describe three different families and the point systems they used. On the following page is a sample chart. Write the chores in the left column with the points assigned to each task. On each day of the week, indicate the points earned for each task completed.

On the lower part of the page, indicate possible rewards along with how many points are needed to gain that reward.

View the following pages to see a charts filled-in.

Name:

Chores	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1. (pts)							
2. (pts)							
3. (pts)							
4. (pts)							
5. (pts)							
6. (pts)							
7. (pts)							
8. (pts)							

REWARDS:

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**
- 5.**
- 6.**
- 7.**
- 8.**

COST:

- pts
pts
pts
pts
pts
pts
pts
pts

THE RILEYS

Sam, 13, and Lucy, 9, are constantly arguing and teasing each other, so Lucy comes crying to her mother, Lynn, several times a day. Sam has poor marks in school because he "forgets" to bring his homework home. Lynn has to shout at Sam and Lucy to get them to do their jobs (washing dishes, taking the rubbish out, cleaning their rooms, and feeding the dog). They argue with her much of the time that she is shouting at them. Mom reminds Lucy every night to take a shower and brush her teeth, and Lucy whines and delays. Sam only puts his dirty clothes in the washing basket once a week, so he often runs out of clean clothes.

The Rileys made a list of the behaviors that needed to improve, and discussed exactly what each behavior meant. Then Mom assigned points to be earned for each behavior, giving more points for those that needed more effort. Finally, Lynn came up with a list of rewards she knew the kids would work for. She assigned "prices" that included some cheap items, so that a reward could be earned the same day that Sam or Lucy had made very good progress. Here are the lists Mom came up with:

BEHAVIORS: SAM

- homework preparation (2 Pts.)
- no arguments before dinner (2 Pts.)
- empty rubbish (1 Pt.)
- clean room (2 Pts.)
- homework completion (4 Pts.)
- no arguments after dinner (1 Pt.)
- wash dishes (2 Pts.)
- do own laundry (4 Pts.)

BEHAVIORS:LUCY

- shower (2 Pts.); brush teeth (1 Pt.)
- no arguments before dinner (3 Pts.)
- wash dishes (2 Pts.)
- tidy room (2 Pts.)
- no arguments after dinner (1 Pt.)
- feed dog (1 Pt.)

REWARDS: SAM

- ✓ renting video (25 Pts.)
- ✓ roller skating with friend (30 Pts.)
- ✓ new music (60 Pts.)
- ✓ going to sports event with uncle (50 Pts.)
- ✓ having friend overnight (40 Pts.)
- ✓ board or card game with Mom (10 Pts.)
- ✓ having friend share dinner (30 Pts.)

REWARDS:LUCY

- ✓ renting video or movie (15 Pts.)
- ✓ board or card game with Mom (8 Pts.)
- ✓ movie with Mom or friend (40 Pts.)
- ✓ art supplies (14 Pts.)
- ✓ having friend overnight (20 Pts.)
- ✓ new fish for fish tank (30 Pts.)
- ✓ half hour bike ride with Mom (15 Pts.)

On the next page is the chart Mom filled in.

Name: Sam

Chores	Mon	Tuesday	Wed	Thursday	Friday	Sat	Sun
1. Homework preparation (2 pts)							
2. Homework completion (4 pts)							
3. No arguments before dinner (2 pts)							
4. No arguments after dinner (1 pt)							
5. Emptying trash (1 pt)							
6. Washing dishes (2 pts)							
7. Cleaning Room (2 pts)							
8. Doing own laundry (4 pts)							

REWARDS:

1. Renting video
2. Having friend overnight
3. Roller skating with friend
4. Mom fixes favorite dessert
5. Board or card game with Mom
6. Music CD
7. Having friend over for dinner
8. Going to sports event with uncle

COST:

- 25 pts
- 40 pts
- 30 pts
- 10 pts
- 10 pts
- 60 pts
- 30 pts
- 50 pts

THE ALVAREZES

Tomas, 7, Juan, 8, and Teresa, 12 argue with their mother, Maria, about having to help with the housework. They complain so much that Maria does all of the jobs herself. Tomas and Juan are very jealous of any attention Mom gives the other one or Teresa, and one often hits the other when Mom isn't looking, then denies it. Teresa monopolizes the telephone, which means that Maria can't talk to her friends very often. When she does, Tomas and Juan interrupt her continually. Teresa has got into the habit of not coming home after school and not telling Mom where she is. Mom is worried that Teresa will start using drugs and alcohol, and that she doesn't like her mother anymore. She is feeling cut off from Teresa. Teresa also swears at Mom several times a week.

Mom sat down with her children and did the same thing as the Rileys did. Here are the lists Mom came up with:

BEHAVIORS: TOMAS AND JUAN

- not hitting for one day (3 Pts.)
- empty trash (1 Pt.)
- take shower (2 Pts.)
- not interrupting Mom on the phone (1 Pt.)
- admit hitting when asked (2 Pts.)
- pick up clothes off floor (1 Pt.)
- put toys away before bed (2 Pts.)

BEHAVIORS: TERESA

- get off the phone when Mom asks (3 Pts.)
- limit phone use to 20 minutes each day (2 Pts.)
- not swearing at home for one day (3 Pts.)
- talking to Mom about after school plans (2 Pts.)
- playing with Tomas and Juan (1 Pt.)

REWARDS: TOMAS AND JUAN

- ✓ playing video games with Mom (5 Pts.)
- ✓ Mom takes boys to burger place (25 Pts.)
- ✓ half hour of games at the arcade (40 Pts.)
- ✓ staying up an extra hour at weekends (12 Pts.)
- ✓ renting video game (20 Pts.)
- ✓ playing board game with Mom (8 Pts.)
- ✓ having a friend overnight (40 Pts.)

REWARDS: TERESA

- ✓ extra half hour on telephone (12 Pts.)
- ✓ friend overnight (25 Pts.)
- ✓ staying up and extra hour at weekends (12 Pts.)
- ✓ shop for clothes with Mom (40 Pts.)
- ✓ movie with friends (35 Pts.)

Name: Teresa

Chores	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
1. Getting off phone (3 pts)							
2. Limit phone use to 20 mins (2 pts)							
3. Not swearing for one day (3 pts)							
4. Tell Mom about plans with friends (2 pts)							
5. Empty trash (1 pt)							
6. Washing dishes (2 pts)							
7. Cleaning room (2 pts)							
8. Playing with Tomas and Juan (1 pt)							

REWARDS:

1. Extra half hour on phone
2. Having friend overnight
3. Roller skating with friend
4. Mom fixes favorite dessert
5. Shop for clothes with Mom
6. Music CD
7. Movie with friends
8. Staying up an extra half hour

COST:

- 12 pts
- 25 pts
- 30 pts
- 10 pts
- 40 pts
- 60 pts
- 35 pts
- 12 pts

THE CHANDLERS

Ellen, 10, and Robert, 14 are rarely at home. Both are hanging around kids who have been in trouble with the school and with the police. When they are at home, their parents nag them about their homework, tidying the house, and their appearance. Their parents, Laura and Jake, know that their nagging is driving the kids out of the house. Robert often swears at Mom when Dad isn't around. The parents are feeling like they are losing control of their kids, and fear the kids will get into trouble. The Chandlers came up with these lists:

BEHAVIORS: ELLEN

- come home after school (2 Pts.)
- do jobs without reminders (3 Pts.)
- discuss plans with friends with Mom or Dad (1 Pt.)
- complete homework and show it to parents (4 Pts.)
- bring friends to the house (1 Pt.)
- speak politely when disagreeing (1 pt.)

BEHAVIORS: ROBERT

- come home after school (3 Pts.)
- complete homework (4 Pts.)
- do jobs after one reminder (1 Pt.)
- not swearing at Mom for three days (5 Pts.)
- bring friends to the house (1 Pt.)
- do jobs with no reminder (3 Pts.)
- discuss plans with friends with Mom or Dad (2 Pts.)

REWARDS: ELLEN

- ✓ playing cards with Mom (6 Pts.)
- ✓ staying overnight with a friend (25 Pts.)
- ✓ having friend overnight (15 Pts.)
- ✓ renting video (30 Pts.)
- ✓ staying up an extra hour at weekends (15 Pts.)
- ✓ going to fast food restaurant with parent (22 Pts.)
- ✓ Mom or Dad taking Ellen and friend skating (40 Pts.)
- ✓ horse-riding with Mom (120 Pts.)

REWARDS: ROBERT

- ✓ having friend overnight (20 Pts.)
- ✓ choosing the dinner menu (15 Pts.)
- ✓ staying out an extra hour at weekends (20 Pts.)
- ✓ playing board games with Mom or Dad (8 Pts.)
- ✓ going to sports game with Dad (180 Pts.)
- ✓ renting video game (25 Pts.)
- ✓ taking friend to cinema (40 Pts.)

THE CHANDLERS—ONE WEEK LATER

A week after setting up this point system, the Chandlers all sat down together to see how it was going and what needed to be changed. Ellen improved by coming home after school four days in a row, and discussing her plans before leaving to join friends. She also completed her homework and showed it to her dad every day, (although it was done too quickly several times). She had done more of her jobs after the first reminder than usual.

Robert made similar improvements, but only came home after school once. However, he did phone and tell his Mom where he was. He swore around his Mom less, and started talking to his dad more about what he was doing with friends. He did his jobs more often without reminders.

Both Mom and Dad went over this progress and told Ellen and Robert how much they appreciated their efforts. They asked Ellen to work on talking politely when she was angry (suggesting she use "I Statements"). They asked Robert to continue to phone if he wasn't coming home, but also to come directly home two days a week. The point system was adjusted for Robert by adding these behaviors: phoning home after school (1 Pt.) and bringing friends home (3 Pts.). For Ellen, they added the behavior of doing her homework carefully for 2 points.

Ellen had earned 35 points that week, and decided to spend 22 points going to a pizza place the next night with her Mom. Robert had earned 26 points and decided to stay out for an extra hour on Saturday night, to which Mom and Dad agreed.

Here is the fourth family. After reading about the problems, think of specific problem behaviors that can be worked on, and make up some rewards you think might work. Finally, assign points to each behavior and amount of points needed to earn each reward.

THE CLANTONS

The parents, Bill and Val, are very busy with their jobs and haven't paid much attention to their 15-year old daughter, Kelsey. She is unhappy about this, and cannot get Bill and Val's attention, unless it's by saying or doing irritating things. She takes Val's makeup and clothes without asking, and tells her parents' guests about their arguments. She eats all the cookies without asking, and calls Bill at his office several times a week with complaints about Val being too bossy. Kelsey does well in school, but doesn't have any friends. When schoolmates call, she won't accept their offers to join them. Her parents also have difficulty getting her to help out around the house when they ask her to pick up her clothes and books, or help in the kitchen, etc.

YOUR FAMILY

Always look for chances to use a point system. Think of things you nag your children to do or not do, and set up a point system to change their behavior. Tear out the blank charts on page 103. Make copies and fill in the different sections with chores and rewards and the points needed to earn a reward. Put it on the refrigerator or in some other visible place so that everyone can agree upon and view the weekly progress.