

Working Together, Not Apart

by

Sally Goldberg, Ph.D.

Question. Stickers and stars seem to be so much a part of bringing up children. What are some recommended ways to use them for the start of the new school year?

Answer. The key is to use them to motivate children to work together and not apart. Here is how I found out.

The scene was Sunday afternoon on December 1, 2002 at a fair in Boca Raton, Florida. On that day I had a table set up with a display of my parenting books and products. Constructive Parenting was the featured book, and many people were stopping by to inquire about it.

While I was busy answering questions, Bonnie Rosenthal from Boca Raton came to my table. She called me aside and said, "I have a wonderful parenting technique that I would like to share with you because I believe it could make a difference to other families. Since you have a wide audience of people you meet, I would like you to consider passing it on to others." Struck by her sincerity, I said, "Yes, please tell me." Then she said, "I need to sit down."

Somewhat taken aback by this comment, I said, "Please come in." Then she entered my booth, sat down, and proceeded to tell me her story.

"About 20 years ago," she started, "when my children were young, about 7, 11, and 12, I believed that they weren't doing as well in school as I felt they could, and I also was concerned that they were not interested in one another as friends and supporters. I had always tried to instill in them the idea that throughout their lives they needed to know that they were there for one another, and cared deeply about each other. But that wasn't happening to my satisfaction. After much thought, I finally came up with a family star game.

I designed a chart which was prominently displayed on the refrigerator for the entire family to see. Each child selected his/her own color star, and whenever that child earned good grades on any type of school project, quiz, or test, they were awarded a designated number of stars in their color to affix to the chart. The chart soon became a rainbow of the three colors my children had each chosen.

Well, it's hard to believe how suddenly everyone was rooting for one another! After school, each in turn would run into the kitchen clutching his/her latest achievement and proudly affix the earned stars for everyone to see! Since each child could contribute

equally to the goal, (a first grader's quiz was just as valuable as a fifth grader's project), there was a sense of support and not of competition. In fact, if one of the kids had a problem, that child would turn to his/her siblings for help! AMAZING!!

When the chart accumulated 100 stars from all of the children together, the children were awarded \$50. However, this \$50 needed to be spent together on a collective reward since they had all earned it together. Each time they got to this point they would have their own private meeting, decide upon a plan that would fit into their budget, and then together enjoy their reward.

I think what amazed me the most was that the system continued for many years. Even from college the older kids would call to find out how their younger sister was doing. She was so into it, that even after her brothers were no longer participating, she continued to earn her stars.

Ultimately they decided to bank their reward money. A few years ago they cashed out. The two older kids who were already working contributed some additional money, and they all went on a trip together!"

Bonnie was right. She did need to sit down and explain her concept to me. She did need to pass on her idea so that I could in turn pass it on to others. In her desire to figure out a way to motivate her children to achieve, inspire them to always want to

remain friends, encourage them to care about each other, and help them to pull together, she created this family concept. It provides a concrete way to help children who are usually treated in such a competitive way to learn to work together.

Moreover, years later, Bonnie saw that she did accomplish her goal. Her grown children succeeded academically and remained close friends. They continue to pool their efforts and support each other. In addition, she thinks this is one of the character building experiences that they all had that has helped them to be contributing members of their communities and supportive participants in their respective work places.

“Thank you, Bonnie.”

Sally Goldberg, Ph.D., parenting specialist, empowers parents to solve parenting problems. She gives weekly parenting classes in different locations in Scottsdale, AZ. If you would like to contact Dr. Sally, you can reach her at 480-766-6323 or by email drsally@drsallyparenting.com.

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