The Points Playbook

A short guide to using the Points app with your child — and, just as important, getting it to actually stick.

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The whole idea, in a minute

Your child earns points for a few specific things you're working on together. The points show up big at the top of the screen. When they've saved enough, they trade points at the prize counter for something they genuinely want.

That's it: catch the good stuff, reward it on the spot, and let them cash in. Psychologists call this a **token economy** — the points are the "tokens." It has decades of research behind it, and it works for a simple reason we'll get to next.

Why it works

Kids repeat what gets noticed

When something a child does is rewarded right after it happens, they're more likely to do it again. That's **positive reinforcement**, and it's the engine of the whole system. The key word is *right after* — the sooner the point lands, the more it teaches.

Points are like money

On their own, points are just taps on a screen. They only become powerful once your child learns they reliably buy things they want. Money is the same — paper is worthless until you can spend it. So the trading part isn't a bonus feature. It's the thing that gives points their value in the first place.

Your words come along for the ride

Every time you hand over a point, add a few warm, specific words: "You put your shoes on the rack the first time — that's a point!" Over time, your attention becomes a

reward all by itself. That's exactly where you want to end up — and it's how you'll eventually coast without the app.

Put it on the home screen

This puts a Points icon right on your phone's home screen, so it opens full-screen with one tap — just like a regular app. It's free, takes about ten seconds, and there's nothing to download from an app store.

iPhone & iPad

Use the Safari browser

1. Open the Points link in **Safari**.
2. Tap the **Share** button — the square with an arrow pointing up (at the bottom of the screen, or the top on an iPad).
3. Scroll down and tap **Add to Home Screen**.
4. Tap **Add** in the top corner. Done.

Android

Use the Chrome browser

1. Open the Points link in **Chrome**.
2. Tap the ⋮ **menu** (three dots, top-right corner).
3. Tap **Add to Home screen** (or **Install app**).
4. Tap **Add** to confirm. Done.

Using a different browser? Look in its menu for "Add to Home Screen" — most phone browsers keep it in the same place.

Setting it up

1. Tap the gear **(⚙️)** to open Parent Setup, and set a **PIN** so little hands can't quietly rewrite the rules.
2. Pick **two or three** things to work on. Name them in plain, doable terms — "shoes on the rack," not "stop being messy."
3. Leave each one at **1 point**. You can change it, but start simple (there's a good reason below).

4. Build a short **prize menu**: a few things your child truly wants, that *you* control, priced from cheap to save-up-for.

5. Hand it over, and start catching the good stuff.

The habits that make it work

- **Give the point right away.** A point ten minutes later teaches ten times less.
- **Say what earned it.** Name the behavior out loud as you tap. That's half the value.
- **Keep it positive.** The app is built to *add* points, not take them away. Taking points back tends to turn the whole thing into a fight — if you ever want penalties, add them later and ideally with a professional's help.
- **Both grown-ups, same rules.** Kids find the gap between two caregivers remarkably fast.
- **Make earning and spending easy.** One tap to give, quick and simple to cash in. More on why that matters next.

The traps that sink these systems

Almost every point system that fizzles fails in one of these few ways. They're easy to avoid once you know them.

Trap 1 — Making it too complicated

The trap

Ten behaviors, bonus rules, points that change by the day. It's thrilling for a week, and then everyone forgets. Here's the rule of thumb: **if it's hard for *you* to keep up with, it won't survive.**

The fix

Two or three behaviors. One point each. That's the whole system. A simple one you actually run beats a clever one you abandon by Thursday. You can always add more once it's a habit.

Trap 2 — Too many rewards, or rewards you don't really control

The trap

A giant prize menu, or prizes your child can already get for free — screen time they have anyway, snacks they can reach in the pantry. **If they can get it without points, points can't buy it**, and the whole currency loses its meaning.

The fix

Keep the menu short, and stock it only with things *you* hold the keys to. If a reward is on the menu, it comes **through** the points — not on the side. A small handful of things they truly want, truly gated behind points, is what gives the points their teeth.

Trap 3 — Making trading a hassle

The trap

"You can cash those in later." "Hang on, let me find the tablet." "We'll do it this weekend." Every bit of friction and delay between earning and enjoying makes the points feel less real. Children read effort and waiting as *not worth it* — and quietly stop trying.

The fix

Make cashing in fast and easy — ideally the reward is ready to hand over the moment they trade. **The easier it is to spend, the more the points are worth.** (This cuts both ways: keep it easy for *you* to give points, too. That's why the app is just a tap.)

Trap 4 — Not trading often enough at the start

The trap

Saving up two weeks for one big prize. To a young child, two weeks is forever — so the points never get connected to anything real, and the whole thing never catches on.

The fix

At the beginning, let them spend **often** — even a few times a day — on small, cheap rewards. Every single trade drives home the lesson: *points turn into good things.* Once they clearly get it and are hooked, you can start stretching toward bigger, save-up prizes. Frequent early payoffs are how points earn their power in the first place — especially for little ones, who live very much in the now.

Also worth watching

The reward goes stale

The same prize every day stops feeling special — anything you get constantly loses its shine. **Rotate the menu:** keep a couple of favorites, swap the rest in and out, so there's always something worth working for.

Points pile up and nothing happens

Prices so high they can never afford anything — or a balance that just grows and grows — will kill the motivation either way. Price things so a good day or two buys *something*, and always keep one cheap option on the menu for a quick win.

Winding it down

The goal was never points forever — it's the habits (and the good feeling of your attention) sticking on their own. Once a behavior is solid, quietly stretch things out: reward it a little less often, lean more on "hey, I noticed that — nice," and eventually retire that item and drop a new one in its place.

Think of the points as training wheels, not the bike.

Quick-start checklist

- [ ] Two or three behaviors, named in plain, doable words
- [ ] One point each to start
- [ ] Short prize menu — things they want, that you control
- [ ] At least one cheap prize for quick wins
- [ ] Give points right away, and say what earned them
- [ ] Let them trade often in the early days
- [ ] Same rules for both grown-ups
- [ ] Rotate prizes when they start to go stale

Sharing between phones (optional)

If both parents want the same point jar on their own phones, turn on **Family Sync**. Tap a job on one phone and it shows up on the other a second later. It's completely optional — skip it and the app keeps working exactly like it does now.

1. On the phone you've been using, tap the gear (⚙️) → **Sync** → **Start a family**. Whatever's already on that phone comes along.
2. Tap **Invite parent** and text the link to the other parent. They open it and tap **Join family**. (Or they can type the family code in the same spot.)
3. That's it — both phones now share one point jar. It still works with no signal; changes catch up when the phone's back online.

Do this inside the home-screen icon you actually use (iPhones keep home-screen apps separate from Safari). Keep the family code between the two of you — anyone who has it can see and change the point jar. To stop, tap ⚙️ → Sync → **Stop syncing on this phone**; that phone keeps its current copy.

A note on privacy: unless you turn on Family Sync, the app keeps everything on your own phone — nothing about your child is sent anywhere or stored online. If you do turn it on,

the point jar is stored in a private family record on Perspective Behavioral Health's Google Firebase database, and only phones with your family code can open it.

Where this comes from

This guide rests on well-established behavioral science — positive reinforcement and token economies — with decades of research behind it across homes, classrooms, and clinics. A few good places to read more:

Ayllon, T., & Azrin, N. H. (1968). *The Token Economy: A Motivational System for Therapy and Rehabilitation.* Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2020). *Applied Behavior Analysis* (3rd ed.). Pearson.

Hackenberg, T. D. (2009). Token reinforcement: A review and analysis. *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior, 91*(2).

Kazdin, A. E. (2008). *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child.* Houghton Mifflin.

McMahon, R. J., & Forehand, R. L. (2003). *Helping the Noncompliant Child* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

This is a general parenting tool, not medical or psychological treatment. If your child's behavior has you worried, it's always worth talking with a professional who can look at your family's specific situation.



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