

## If/Then Statements

If/then Statements are used in order to clearly state the positive or negative consequences that will occur after a non-preferred activity or task is completed. When using If Statements, you want to explain what the reinforcement is first. So if behavior B is eating chocolate cake and behavior A is eating peas, you would say “If you want a piece of cake, you need to eat all your peas”. Notice the word "if". “If” is there to show a child that accessing the reward is contingent upon completing the task. So if the child still refuses to eat the peas, what happens? They don’t get any cake. The child is given the power to earn, or lose the reinforcer.

Some may wonder, “Why does it matter which one I say first?” The reason you want to state the high probability behavior first (eating cake, playing with phone, etc.) is to prime the child to focus on what they are *getting*, and not what they are *giving/what they have to do*. Keep the child’s focus on the reward. If you state what they must do first, all the child hears is the demand. By stating the reinforcing item or activity first, it is often much easier to get a child to comply.

Some children can handle it if you state the demand first, and for other children you must state the reward first. Typically, when I have clients who have a history of noncompliance then I am careful to state the reward first.

Don’t focus on or state what the child will lose, no one likes doing things to avoid contacting something negative. We all like doing things to contact something positive. As much as possible, ensure success by being aware of how you present demands. Don’t create situations where it will be likely that the child will refuse to comply. Every demand that comes out of your mouth has the potential of being followed, or being ignored. As the adults, if we are more careful of how we present demands then we can help the child be successful and contact reinforcement much more readily.

Some best practices to keep in mind when using If Statements:

- Keep statements short and easy to understand
- Do not attach a punishment onto the statement
- Repeat the statement if you need to, using the exact same wording every time
- If your child needs help completing the task, help them. They should still get the reward part of the deal even if they needed help.



Receiving the reward is contingent upon your child completing the demand.

So if your child refuses to do the three questions on their homework – they **don't** get 5 minutes on the iPad. The child is given the power to earn or lose the reinforcer, and they are able to make a choice.

If they verbally protest, for example whining, crying, saying “no!” but they are still *doing what was asked*, remember that actions speak louder than words. If the task is completed, reward your child.

**A vital part of this process is that you MUST follow through with the reward. Your child WILL remember that you did not follow through and will be less likely to believe you the next time you present them with an If/Then statement. Show them that your words matter, and that you truly mean what you say by following through.**

One program we like for younger children is called the First-Then Schedule on [teacherspayteachers.com](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com)

[https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/First-Then-Visual-Schedule-4838540?utm\\_source=Pinterest&utm\\_campaign=first%20then](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/First-Then-Visual-Schedule-4838540?utm_source=Pinterest&utm_campaign=first%20then)

On the next page is a setup that you can utilize as well.



If you would like to earn:

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Then I need you to:

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\*Things that kids can earn should be something immediate. They need to see the contingency be followed through with quickly. Some examples are: 15 minutes on the tablet, a specific number of marbles, playing their favorite game, a sticker, etc.

\*\*I would only outline 1-2 things maximum for the behaviors that you would like to see. We want to set them up for success, and using less words and having clear expectations will be key to do this. Some good examples of behavior expectations are: have a positive attitude ("This might be tough, but I can do this!", "I am a hard worker, and I have done hard things before!", etc.) be kind in your words (toward yourself and others), be gentle with our body (it is unexpected and unsafe to hurt yourself), use your feelings chart to let someone know how you feel, use your words to tell someone what you need. In the beginning, I would put only 1-2 behaviors down so that they get the hang of this process.

