

Walk to School (WTS) Handout

Differential attention: The use of praising and ignoring

Your attention is very rewarding to your child. Use your attention to reward your child for planning to walk to school and then for following through. The fundamental rule is to show your child what you value by the things you respond to. Ignore things like complaints or dawdling. This strategy can also be used with other health behaviors such as healthy eating.

Behaviors to Praise:

- Walking to or from school
- Responding to the check in text messages
- Setting goals to walk to school
- Using the Walking to School Checklist or getting things ready for walking to school
- Waking up early to walk to school
- Talking about walking to school
- Checking the weather for walking to school
- Using the action plan to overcome barriers

Behaviors to Ignore:

- Complaints about walking to school
- Not walking to school when they planned to
- Dawdling or taking a long time to get ready to walk to school
- Efforts to divert your attention away walking to school

How to Use Differential Attention:

If you use differential attention by consistently paying attention to and praising your child when he or she is walking to school or preparing to walk to school and ignoring him or her when he or she is not, you will teach him or her to develop this healthy habit.

Examples of Praise Statements

Verbal Praise:

Label the specific behavior and indicate your approval. It's that easy!

- Great job walking to school!
- I like it when you ... (check the weather; get your stuff ready to walk to school)
- Hey, you're really proactive. You ... (are using the walking to school checklist)
- Thank you for getting up early to walk to school!
- You're doing a great job of ... (responding to the text messages)

Shaping

Link to Dr. Alan Kazdin's video on shaping: <https://www.coursera.org/lecture/everyday-parenting/shaping-Oc8zs>

Incentives

While differential attention is a more effective long-term strategy for behavior change, incentives might also be a good way to motivate kids when beginning a new behavior. Incentives are the reward we earn for meeting our goals. Just like parents earn a paycheck when they go to work, we all should earn something when we are trying to change our behaviors and make improvements in our health. After all, incentives work! When you're thinking about blowing off your goal, but you remember that great incentive that you'll earn if you meet the goal, you are much more likely to follow through and actually accomplish the task, like walking to school.

What Are Your Child's Preferred Activities/Rewards?

Please take a few minutes to write down some things your child is likely to work hard to earn. You can write down activities your child enjoys, current privileges, or toys your child likes to play with. Please make at least half of these things free- items that do not cost money, such as having a friend over or playing a game.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____