

## The Danger of Reward and Sticker Charts

Reward systems (internally created or society driven) are one of the most dangerous things for the ND brain, especially ADHD brain. **As a neurodivergent person who's been personally adversely affected by reward systems**, I've written this to explain the way my ADHD brain is affected by them. This is written hopefully with the intention that others are educated and can help children avoid this danger.

For people like me, I **MUST** achieve, no matter what - there is no consideration of failure, and I will suppress any other need I have and push my brain further than it's been before.

Achievement and the need to meet all expectations is consuming.

This need for achievement in the ADHD brain is called **Reward Deficiency Syndrome**. It's not something which is very well-known and yet every ADHD'er experiences it to some extent. I am driven for reward and rewards give me an awesome hit of dopamine in my brain. Rewards make my brain go



into overdrive - to a place which is unsustainable outside of the reward focus. I am at a point now where I have pushed my brain so far, due to me using achievement as a dopamine-inducing reward system, that I cannot even socialise outside of work. My brain cannot manage situations without this dopamine source (achievement / reward) due to how far I've pushed my brain over the years. If a conversation lacks what I perceive as purpose or necessity, I cannot make myself have it / be part of it. Work for me is the best dopamine hit and I'm addicted to the rewards it continually provides.

For kids, with school rewards such as star charts, they (children) push their little brains so far to achieve or demonstrate the behaviour which will gain the reward, then they come home and are unable to manage their excessive brain energy they've created with their intense drive and focus. One of my little ppl has removed his fingernails and toenails this week due to losing one of the stars on this chart and not being able to manage the anxiety over this massive hyperfocus being unsuccessful. Loss like this to the 2E (twice exceptional) brain is insurmountable and way more than what the brain can achieve.

## Then there is the other side...

For children who lack the skills to achieve the reward, the presence of reward doesn't automatically teach them the skills they need.

If you set up a reward system which required me to do calculus to get the reward, I would know immediately this was unachievable and know I was definitely going to fail.



This would cause either feelings of loss and failure, or the more likely ADHD-driven need to make a big deal and **“fail epically”**. I would disrupt everyone trying to achieve the reward, making sure they all saw how bad and irrelevant it was (because I can't do it) and would go out with a bang.

Reward systems infer that children have the skills to be well behaved but have chosen not to and therefore the notion of reward will drive them to suddenly behave. Yet, why would a child choose not to behave? Do any of us choose not to behave when we know how to behave?

**Children do well and behave when they can.** Children who aren't behaving are like this because they actually lack the skills to do so. They need to be taught these skills.

Reward systems only highlight their lack of skills in a certain area and shame them.

Reward systems are overall one of the most dangerous behaviour tools used in schools and in society for neurodivergent children.

Reward systems are different to modalities such as everyone having a pizza party for getting through the year (at the end of term), **as long as**

**everyone is invited, regardless of their academic performance and/or behaviour.**

Celebrations such as these are not rewarding anything other than attendance and the person doesn't have to do anything in order to be able to celebrate with their peers.

I call indiscriminate pizza parties "celebrations". They aren't based on this reward system premise.

For further information about this, have a look at sponge bob, he says it better than me

<https://youtu.be/OGQx37dwnhM>

For more info on aversive and dangerous behaviour reward systems:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JiBpVxSY0hha6BaUGRM6iRbO2lgU2LI3fmNARyNy8h4/mobilebasic>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/02/perils-of-sticker-charts/470160/>

Help us move the change to non-ABA strategies by adopting brain-based and sensory based integration interventions.  
Join FB group "The OTHER Way" to find the community pushing this movement.

[The OTHER way \(public group\)](#) | [Facebook](#) \*There are no copyright restrictions on this work and you're welcome to share it.

