

Reward and Punishment

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Abstract

Rewards and Punishment refers to the positive and negative stimuli respectively, following a particular behaviour or action. This paper aims to compare the rewards and punishment used by parents in the present and previous generation. Interview method was used to gather data for this qualitative research from 20 participants selected by convenience sampling. Results show that only punishment was majorly used in previous generation. Present generation use both rewards and punishment, yet struggles to bring out the desired output.

Keywords: Reward, punishment, child, parent

Introduction

Rewards and punishment are a part of every child's life. Parents and teachers use both to shape a child's behaviour.

Rewards are positive stimuli or outcomes that are given or received in response to a specific behaviour or action, with the intention of encouraging and reinforcing that behaviour. Rewards serve as incentives, motivating individuals to repeat the behaviour or action that led to their receipt. They can take various forms, depending on the context and the preferences of the individual involved.

Punishment refers to the application of negative consequences or aversive stimuli following a particular behaviour or action, with the aim of reducing or eliminating the likelihood of that behaviour recurring in the future. Punishments are used to discourage undesirable or inappropriate behaviours.

In a study by Jitka and Silvie, the most often used reward forms were compliments, followed by shared experience, candy bars and appreciation. On the other hand, the most commonly used form of punishments is shared problem solving and rectification, followed by the keeping of favourites toys, threats, and physical punishment.

In the book *Punished by Rewards*, Kohn highlights that while these external motivators may generate short-term compliance, they often fail to ignite a genuine love for learning. Intrinsic motivation is your internal drive to do something just because you enjoy it or find it fulfilling, rather than for obvious rewards (or to avoid some form of punishment).

According to Kohn, our focus on rewards and punishments can unintentionally hinder a child's autonomy, creativity, and intrinsic motivation. His research process included asking parents what kind of adults they would like their children to grow into. The answers were very similar and included themes around being happy, independent, productive, and kind adults. Kohn then asked the parents to think about how using rewards and punishments to elicit obedience and compliance without arguments would contribute to raising children who would become the adults they imagined.

Studies have investigated the carrot and the stick approach in present day context. Originally applying to animals, it describes whether to get it to move by enticing the animal with a nice juicy carrot in front of it

as a reward, or beating it with a stick. A simple experiment by Washington University suggested that punishments are more likely to influence behaviour than rewards.

Parents are suggested to be more aware of how to use rewards and to make a conscious decision as follows:

- Involve the kids in decision-making – it gives them a chance to use problem-solving and it makes them feel valued. They may not always have the experience to make the right decisions, but it opens up healthy discussions
- Give kids the responsibility to set goals for themselves – Parents still need to help them see the value of meeting those goals, but they will be invested because they have been afforded the autonomy to identify what is important for them
- Give them choices – not just about whether they want the red or blue cup, but more importantly about the process and sequence of things.

Parents and teachers who care about helping students to learn, should be doing everything possible to help them forget that grades exist. Even praise can become a verbal bribe that gets kids hooked on our approval. Promising goodies to children for good behaviour can never produce anything more than temporary obedience.

Objective

This paper aims to compare the rewards and punishment used by parents in the present and previous generation.

Methodology

Interview method was used to gather data for this qualitative research. 20 participants (parents of school-age children) were selected by convenience sampling.

The following open-ended questions were asked to the participants:

Do you reward / punish your child? If yes, how and why?

As a child, were you rewarded / punished by your parents? If yes, how and why?

Result

	Present generation parents	Previous generation parents
Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Words of appreciation * Cooking their favourite food (by mothers) Above both forms of reward are for simple achievements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Buying gifts for a higher-level achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * No gifts * No direct words of appreciation in most cases * Rare occasions of sharing child’s achievement/ merit to relatives/ friends
Reasons for reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Good academic performance * Good behaviour 	-
Punishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Stopping the child from watching television or playing games on mobile phone for a certain period of time * Scolding the child * Hitting the child, rarely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Scolding-most common * Hitting * Scolding in public

	* Scold along with an explanation of what mistake the child had committed and why it was wrong	
Reasons for punishment	* Low academic performance * Disrespect * Improper behaviour * Careless attitude	* Low academic performance * Improper behaviour

Discussion

- Reasons for reward and punishment are same in the present generation. In the previous generation low marks or bad behaviour had been punished but good marks and behaviour were not rewarded. Or maybe the absence of a punishment was a reward in itself.
- The participants reflect that children were better or at least at par in overall aspects of academics, discipline and behaviour in the previous generation than in the present generation. Previous generation parents have been able to achieve it without any reward system. This shows that punishment has a better impact than rewards.
- Though the form of rewards varies from inexpensive words of appreciation to expensive gifts, rewards clearly exist in present day parenting. This may hinder this generation of children from being intrinsically motivated and to be a reward-driven generation.
- A conscious thought of the present-day parents to not punish the child in public shows that parents acknowledge and understand better about the self-esteem of kids.
- Also, another betterment in the present generation parents is that, some explains the mistake of the child which had not been so common in previous generation. This will help the child in understanding his/her mistake and how it could have been done right and make necessary changes in future.
- Punishments like reducing screen time raise a serious question. Shouldn't the screen time with so many proven detrimental effects be reduced anyway? Is it just a form of punishment? Things which should have been under strict control by the parent are given only as a form of punishment.
- From the response of the parents, it is understood that the outputs of a child in terms of good marks and good behaviour gets rewarded. But none of the parents had appreciated or even acknowledged the efforts of the child, when the output was less than expected. Learning to appreciate the efforts may be helpful for the child to keep up the motivation on working towards a goal.

Conclusion

While rewards and punishments are a part of every child's life, it's important for the parents to use it wisely and not to over rely on them. It would be beneficial in the initial ages and stages to achieve something. But in the long run, the child must understand and be intrinsically motivated to hold on to the positive acts and stop themselves from getting into negative acts. It cannot be always based on the expectation of a reward or a fear of punishment. It is in the hands of the parents to decide when to use or fade out a reward or punishment and use it optimally.

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