

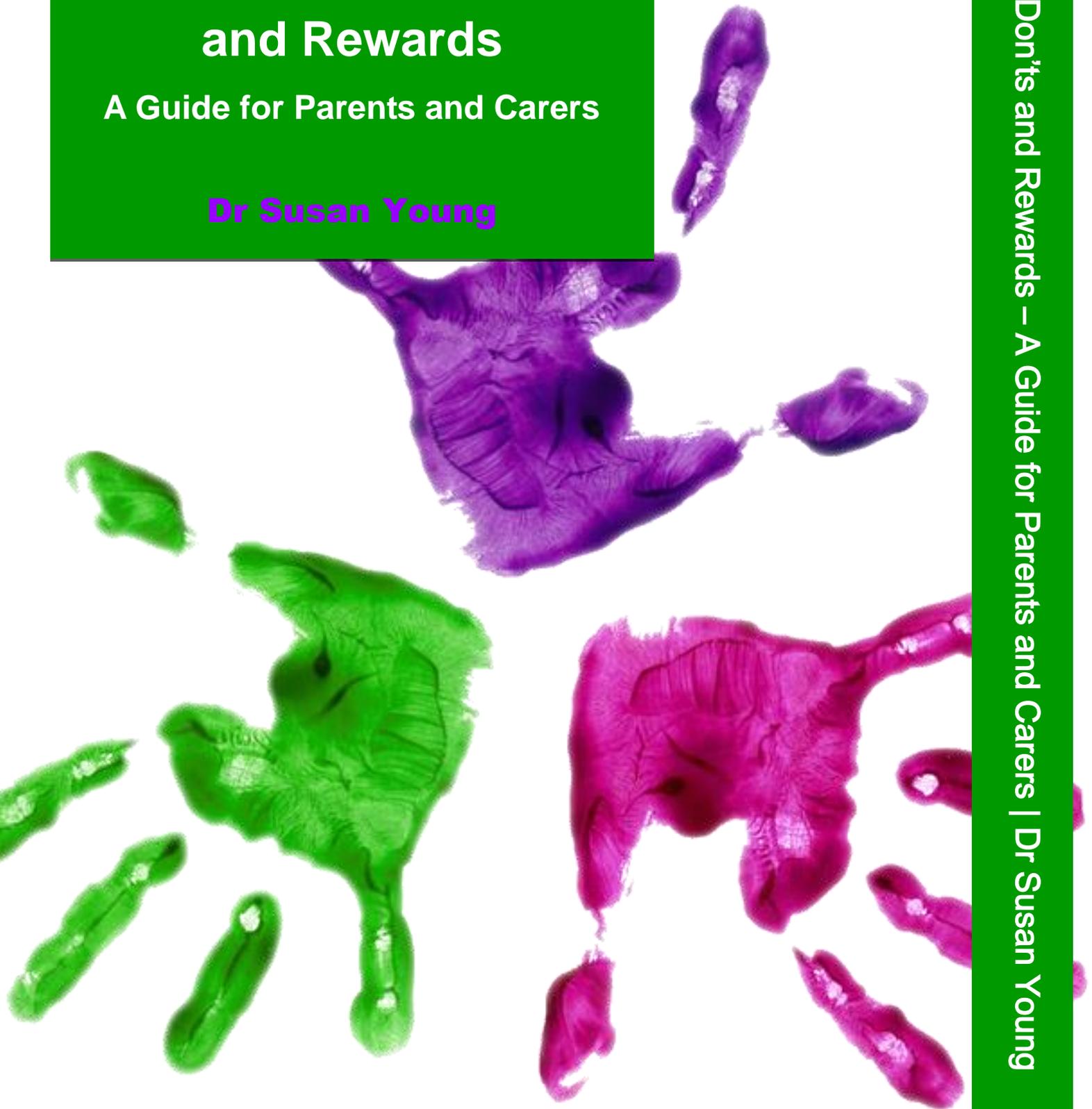
# ADHD

## Do's, Don'ts and Rewards

A Guide for Parents and Carers

Dr Susan Young

ADHD | Do's Don'ts and Rewards – A Guide for Parents and Carers | Dr Susan Young



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# Overview

## About the author



Dr Susan Young is a Clinical Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Mental Health, Division of Brain Sciences, at Imperial College London and Director of Forensic Research & Development at West London Mental Health Trust. In 1994 Susan set up the clinical psychology service at the Maudsley Hospital National Adult ADHD service and she has extensive clinical experience in the assessment and psychological treatment of youths and adults with ADHD. Susan participated in the British Association of Psychopharmacology Consensus Meeting (2007) to develop guidelines for management of transition for ADHD adolescents to adult services. She was a member of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) ADHD Clinical Guideline Development Group (2009); her main contributions being to provide expert guidance on psychological treatment of children and adults with ADHD. Susan is President of the UK ADHD Partnership ([www.UKADHD.com](http://www.UKADHD.com)) and Vice President of the UK Adult ADHD Network ([www.UKAAN.org](http://www.UKAAN.org)). Susan has published numerous articles in scientific journals and books. She has written and published three psychological intervention programmes and authored three books.

## Preface

Managing the behaviours of a child with ADHD at home can be challenging and at times very distressing. Although parents and carers always wish to do their best it is not always easy, especially when having to balance work and family demands. A little support can go a long way, so I developed these materials to provide some general advice for parents and carers about dealing with a child with attentional and/or behavioural problems.

I hope that you find them helpful.

**Dr Susan Young**

# Things you should do

**Use names:** Use your child's name when you are speaking to them to engage them in the conversation and maintain their attention, (e.g. "John listen to what I am saying, I want you to put your coat on").

**Make clear rules:** These must be consistent and understandable.

**Give reminders:** Place reminders around the house to prompt desired behaviours (e.g. Pack your bag for school! Brush your teeth! Switch off mobile phone when doing homework).

**Impose structure and boundaries:** Structure is very important for the management of children with attentional and/or behavioural problems. Set up a consistent daily routine, e.g. homework time, meal time, bed time.

**Close the gap:** Mixed messages are very unhelpful! Children are very good at determining a 'gap' in parenting styles and opinions. They are also very good at using these 'gaps' to their advantage.

**Give clear instructions:** Give detailed instructions one at a time and in a slow and calm manner (for example don't say "Get ready to go to school"; say "Put on your hat, then put on your scarf and then get your school bag").

**Set achievable goals:** Break these down into small steps. Reward at each step, (e.g. by using a Star Chart or stickers).

**Set time limits:** Make sure your child can tell the time. Get them a clock and set time limits for tasks as this will help them to stay focused.

**Set breaks:** Schedule in time to take a break for activities that require sustained attention, (e.g. homework tasks) as this will help your child to stay on task. A clock alarm could be used to indicate the end of a break period.

**Give rewards:** Schedule in rewards for finishing work, e.g. Star and Sticker chart, play time.

**Use positive language:** Inform your child of the behaviour you would *like* to see rather than what you do not want to see, (e.g. using 'do' rather than 'don't').

**Concept checking:** Ask your child to repeat back to you important information or instructions. This will ensure your child has understood what is required.

**Use visual prompts:** Supplement important information that the child must remember that is delivered verbally with visual cues or prompts, (e.g. colour codes to aid organisation or a sad face when you are unhappy with their behaviour).

**Supplement verbally presented information:** Wherever possible, important verbally presented information should always be supplemented in writing.

**Use bright colours:** Engage your child and maintain their attention by using bright colours in any stimuli presented to your child, e.g. using highlighters, coloured pens and putting reminders on brightly coloured post-it notes.

**Give immediate feedback:** Children respond better to immediate feedback. Offer advice, constructive criticism or praise as soon as possible, (e.g. “You did really well to stay seated throughout dinner”).

**Use the ‘1, 2, 3’ approach:** Control bad behaviour, such as tantrums or fighting, by counting aloud to give your child a chance to modify their behaviour, e.g. “I would like you to be sitting on the chair by the time I get to three, .....1.....2.....3”.

**Use time out:** If your child continues to behave in an unacceptable manner use ‘Time-Out’, (e.g. send them to their room or designated ‘Time-Out’ area). This removes your child from the situation and stops the situation from escalating further.

**Create a quiet place:** Identify a quiet and private place for your child, e.g. where they can do their homework or relax. This should not be the same place as their ‘Time-Out zone’.

**Count to ten:** If you are feeling frustrated or stressed with your child, remove yourself temporarily from the situation and count to ten (to yourself).

**Gain support:** If you are feeling upset or run down, talk things over with a family member or friend. Work out comprehensive ways to help each other – two heads are better than one!



# Things you should not do

**Don't lower your expectations:** Your child needs you to expect 110% from them. Without your structure and guidance a child is unaware of their own capabilities and will lower their own expectations of themselves. This will lead to low self-esteem.

**Don't assume:** Don't assume your child has not completed a task or is behaving badly out of spite or choice. Understand that sometimes they have difficulty maintaining the attention to complete a task or control their behaviour. It's often 'can't' rather than 'won't'.

**Don't focus solely on bad behaviour:** Encourage and reinforce good behaviour as this will improve your child's self-esteem.

**Don't apply 'You' statements:** 'You' statements personalise the situation and create conflict, (e.g. "You are unhelpful" or "You are very naughty!"). Try to use 'I' statements instead, (e.g. "I would like you to stop that", "I don't like it when you do that").

**Don't ignore bad behaviour:** In the short-term this may seem attractive, but it is not helpful in the long-term. Be firm and consistent. Just correct their behaviour and point out a better way to respond.

**Don't ask why they have done something:** They may have behaved on impulse and don't know, or they may have forgotten why they did it. 'Why' questions encourage oppositional interactions.

**Don't forget to follow through with consequences:** Always reinforce feedback with consequences for good or bad behaviour. It's important that your child learns about the outcomes of positive and negative behaviours (and starts to engage in consequential thinking for themselves).

**Don't try to reason with your child:** Young children in particular are unable to engage in a rational thinking process and trying to reason with them will therefore rarely resolve the problem and may encourage oppositional interactions. Instead, state your argument in a calm but firm way.

**Don't make deals:** Do not make deals with your child. Rewards are not bribes. You must stay in control and not allow your child to control you.

**Don't resort to physical punishment:** This is never acceptable and only models a behaviour you don't want your child to learn.

# Rewards

**Delivering rewards to reinforce positive behaviours** is an essential behavioural-management strategy as we want these behaviours to occur again in the future. Reinforcement should only be in one direction - positive - because if negative behaviour is rewarded or reinforced then that is more likely to occur in the future. What works best is to reward children using a combination of immediate and short-term rewards (e.g. on a daily basis) with larger rewards after a delay (e.g. after a week of good behaviour). Imagine you are giving a big reward for reaching the top of the stairs but also smaller rewards after every three steps. You can do this easily and cheaply by developing a Star Chart (see example on page 8).

**The first stage is to sit down with the child** and together determine a list of short-term and long-term rewards. In the example short-term rewards are a packet of sweets, football with dad, new colouring pens, chocolate milkshake, having friends visit and swimming. The long-term reward is a trip to the zoo. Next, draw up a Star Chart with a column to record good behaviour and another to list the rewards the child is working towards. The Chart should be pinned up in a visible place such as the kitchen. In order to reach the rewards, the child must gain five 'stars' in a row. These could be rewarded for social acts (e.g. sharing nicely with a sibling), completing a task (e.g. tidying their bedroom) or for avoidance of troublesome behaviour (e.g. a supermarket trip without a tantrum). If your child misbehaves in some way, however, they will 'crash out' and receive a cross. This cancels out the previous stars and they must start again until they obtain five stars in a row to earn their reward.

**The Star Chart** is organised with a short-term reward being given on a daily basis but working towards a greater reward, i.e. the child is working towards a trip to the zoo which is the long-term reward. Thus as the child progresses towards this goal, the smaller short-term rewards are awarded along the way. This will maintain motivation. In the example, the child has earned a packet of sweets, a game of football with dad, new colouring pens, a chocolate milkshake and a friend over for tea. You can see that the child's behaviour has improved during the period with fewer 'crash outs'. The child is getting closer to getting their trip to the zoo!

In addition to these short-term and long-term rewards, immediate rewards can also be given to maintain interest and motivation, and give encouragement. For example, your child could be given verbal praise and/or a sticker.

### Example of a Star Chart

★ ✗ ★★ ✗ ★★★★★ ✓	Packet of sweets
★★★★ ✗ ★★★★★ ✓	Football with dad
★ ✗ ★★ ✗ ★★★★★ ✓	New colouring pens
★★ ✗ ★★★★★ ✓	Chocolate milkshake
★★★★★ ✓	Have a friend over
★★ ✗	Go swimming
	TRIP TO THE ZOO!