

Should you reward your child for A grades?

Psychology expert warns that the child may end up seeing a reward as the goal

(Excerpt of newspaper article by Sandra Davie, The Sunday Times, 1 Apr 2012)

Say you are a parent trying to get your son to aim for all A*s in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). To get him to work hard, you promise him a reward - a trip to Disneyland or the sleek, new iPad, \$150 for every A*.

Sounds like a sure-win strategy, and you know others who have used it to good effect. What child can resist the promise of a big reward?

And all you want is for him to ace the PSLE and make it to a top secondary school, because he will then sail through the rest of his school days and be set for life.

Hold on just a minute, says motivational psychology expert Richard Ryan from Rochester University, New York.

'People focused on rewards miss out on the inner resources of intrinsic motivation and volition. We are most engaged and do our most creative work when we feel that we are acting according to our own will on behalf of goals we find meaningful,' says Prof Ryan.

According to the self-determination theory, all humans have three basic psychological needs: the need to belong or feel connected, the need to feel competent, and the need for autonomy or self-determination. 'When those needs are satisfied, we're motivated, productive and happy. When they are thwarted, our motivation, productivity and happiness plummet,' Prof Ryan says.

Encourage effort

'A reward that acknowledges a great effort is more effective than one that is promised upfront for getting an A. Appreciation is always a better motivator than control.'

What if my child can't deliver top results?

'Should we love them less? That will never help them succeed in life, and the evidence shows this has many long-term costs. Success in life is more likely related to feeling a sense of confidence and security that comes from parents who support their child through successes and setbacks.'

(To read more, go to <http://ifonlysingaporeans.blogspot.com/2012/04/should-you-reward-your-child-for-grades.html?m=1>)