

3 Signs Your Child Is Being Taught Like a Much Younger Child

(And what to do about each one.)

1 An adult still has to say “go” before the routine starts.

Two seventeen-year-olds make coffee. One waits for a staff member to say “time to make your coffee.” The other walks past an empty pot and starts. On paper it is the same skill, scored the same way. Only one of them is doing it in an apartment at twenty-five. If every routine begins with an adult’s voice, the adult has become part of the skill.

WHAT TO DO → SAY THIS

“What’s the natural cue for this — something in the room, not a person? How are we teaching him to respond to that instead?”

2 The reward is a sticker, a token, or a sing-song “gooooood job!”

Watch what happens the next time your teenager does something right. If the response is a voice that jumps half an octave, or a token going onto a chart, ask where else in his life that would happen. Nowhere. Adults get paid, get to leave, or get the coffee. Reinforcement has to grow up alongside the person.

WHAT TO DO → SAY THIS

“He’s [age]. What would a same-age peer actually get for doing this, and can we use that instead?”

3 Someone else hands the reward over.

The important word there is *hands*. If a staff member has to deliver the payoff, then a staff member has to be present — today, and in ten years. When the coffee itself is the reward, when he makes it because he wants coffee, nobody has to be there at all. That is the whole difference between a skill that needs supervision forever and one that doesn’t.

WHAT TO DO → SAY THIS

“Can we set this up so the natural result is the reward, instead of something an adult has to hand him?”

THE FULL METHOD IS IN THE BOOK.

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