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Bribing your kids doesn't work

[Dave McGinn](#)

Examining the things that every parent of a young child has said in moments of extreme frustration, and why experts say you should stop yourself short the next time

Kids have a truly fantastical understanding of money. Waving a toonie in front of a four-year-old is the equivalent of waving a winning lottery ticket. This, in turn, means they can easily be bought. Do they refuse to make their beds? Always avoid doing homework? Get all insufferably whiny when asked to tidy up after themselves? Dangle a few bucks in front of them and they'll be as obedient as a von Trapp child. But you probably know this already, because you've probably bribed your kids for one reason or another.

You need to stop.

"The research is pretty consistent that paying your kids to do something does not build intrinsic motivation," says Dr. Karyn Gordon, a Toronto-based parenting expert. "You might get kind of a quick payoff, but in terms of building their sense of engagement, it's really consistent that it just doesn't work."

In other words, your kid isn't likely to learn any of the values you're trying to teach by having them to make their bed or do their homework or whatever it might be. All they're going to learn is to dig in their heels until you're out of patience and promise a cash reward. Once the cash runs dry, the kids will be the venal brats you've unintentionally taught them to be.

So how do you properly motivate kids? Take a page out of Gordon's playbook and get yourself some marbles. "What are the key responsibilities that your kids actually have? What are the things on a daily basis that they are responsible to do? What are their responsibilities in terms of communication? And then you give marbles and take away marbles, and they can cash in marbles," She says.

Her seven-year-old twins got four marbles the morning I talked to her for making their beds, getting dressed, setting the table and playing quietly as she got up. All of those tasks were set out on a chart.

"I feel fantastic, the kids are being responsible," she says.

Ten marbles will get the kids a play date or a trip to the park. If they want to watch a video, they have to earn another 10 marbles.

It takes some time. "You have to be really committed to it," Gordon says.

New rule at my house: No screaming at each other and you both get five marbles a week. That way I don't have to lose mine.