

SESSION 4

THE SNAKE



OVERVIEW OF THE SNAKE

The Snake is a game in which the child collects stickers that are later traded for fun things or activities. It is used for a limited time to break vicious circles of excessive nagging and conflicts. The Snake works as a reminder for you, as the parent, to confirm and praise your child. The game also makes it easier to create clarity and predictability for your child.

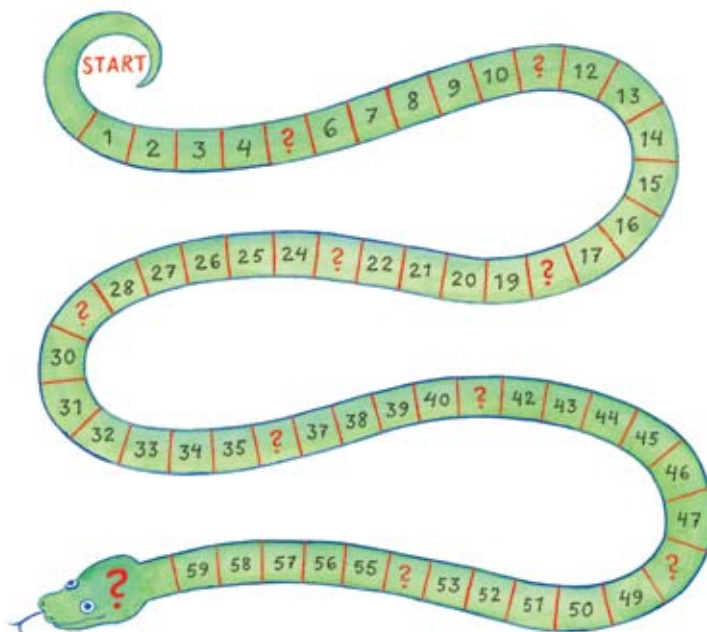
- **Game board.** The Snake consists of a game board with 60 squares. You can also make your own game board with fewer squares if your child is very young (age 3-4) or when the usual Snake is too comprehensive to play.
- **Tasks.** The child is given up to three tasks. A task might be something like going to bed on time. Every time the child completes a task, he/she is given a sticker to put on the game board.
- **Chance cards.** There are a number of question marks on the Snake. When the child gets to a question mark, he/she is allowed to pick a Chance card. On each card, you will have written a fun thing or activity (preferably an activity that you and your child do together).
- **Hidden question marks.** Some children may get tired/lose enthusiasm (especially younger children) right when they have gotten to a question mark because the next one can feel so far away. If this happens, you can start using "hidden question marks." Then you tell the child that there are, for example, eight question marks on the game board that are invisible. You decide in advance which squares will hold the hidden question marks. Some children react negatively to surprises. If your child does not like surprises, do not use hidden question marks.



TELL YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE SNAKE

It is important that your child perceives the Snake as something good and fun. Here are a few suggestions for how you can introduce the Snake.

- Tell your child that you are going to play a game called "The Snake" and briefly explain why. You might say something like "Well, I usually nag and nag when you are supposed to do certain things, and I was thinking we should try playing this game instead."
- Tell your child that he/she will earn a sticker for every task he/she completes.
- Now tell him/her that you are going to pretend that he/she has already completed one of the tasks on the list. Once the child has completed the pretend task, praise him/her and let your child put a sticker on the game board. Tell your child why he/she got the sticker.
- Tell your child that if he/she lands on a question mark, he/she will be allowed to pick a Chance card. Show your child what is on one of the Chance cards.
- Go through the task list. Make sure your child understands what he/she is supposed to do to earn a sticker.
- Put the task list somewhere your child can easily see it, like on the refrigerator.
- Tell your child when you will start playing the Snake game.



TASKS.

On the task list, you describe what is required for the child to earn a sticker in the Snake game. Choose 1-3 tasks based on situations that usually generate a lot of nagging and conflict. Keep in mind that these should be tasks your child can do every day.

- **Clear tasks.** Be clear when you describe the tasks that qualify for stickers, such as "Brush your teeth by 7:20 in the morning." Also try to describe what the child is supposed to do, rather than what he/she is not supposed to do. Choose "Hang up your jacket" instead of "Don't throw your jacket on the floor." If your child cannot read, you can draw pictures that describe the tasks and explain to the child what the pictures mean.
- **Stickers.** When the child has completed his/her task, he/she is given a sticker to put on the Snake. So, the child can earn a total of three stickers in one day.
- **Tasks at the right level of difficulty** The child should be able to complete the tasks successfully about half the time from the very beginning.

TASKS – examples

- Be completely dressed by 7:30 in the morning
- Brush your teeth in the morning the first time you are asked.
- Hang up your jacket when you get home from school.

CHANCE CARDS

- What does your child like? Think about what your child likes and write down activities, things, and privileges on the Chance cards.
- Cheap and simple. Most of the activities and things should be inexpensive and possible to give the child at any time.
- Be clear. Be clear when you write down the fun activities and things so that you keep any discussions of what applies to a minimum. If an activity can only take place on the weekend, write that on the card.
- The head of the Snake. When the child has made it through the entire Snake and come to the last question mark, which is on the Snake's head, the child gets a little bigger surprise. This should preferably be something a little special that the child does not usually otherwise get.



SUGGESTIONS FOR SURPRISES TO USE ON THE CHANCE CARDS

Choose what to have for lunch or dinner

The parent will read an extra story

Rent a movie

Go skateboarding

Bake cookies

Pick a TV show

Stay up 15 minutes past bedtime

Play cards or a game with parent

Go to a museum

Go to the movies

Sleep in a tent one night

Build a fort inside/outside

Be given a thing

Grill hotdogs outdoors

Have a cozy chat and a snack with parent

Play "dress up" with parent

Stay overnight with a friend

Go on an outing

Be in charge of the remote control

Suggestions for surprises. Ask friends and family to help. Ask them if they would like to join in the Snake game. An outing with an adult your child likes can be a popular surprise.

Own suggestions:

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THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU USE THE SNAKE

- Involve others. Tell the other parent or other adults who live with the child about the Snake so you can all pitch in.
- Give stickers right away. Give a sticker as soon as possible after your child has completed a task. The same applies to the Chance cards. If your child has to wait for the surprise, he/she may tire of the game. The less time the child has to wait, the clearer it will become to the child why he/she is getting a surprise. This is especially important to remember when the child is very young.
- Be lavish with your praise! Give your child a lot of praise and confirmation when you give him/her a sticker. You can never show too much appreciation as long as the child knows you are sincere. Tell your child what he/she has done well.
- Plan in advance. If you are short of time when your child lands on a question mark, you can take Chance cards with time-consuming surprises out of the pile before you let your child pick.
- Stick to the rules. Your child may be angry and disappointed if he/she has not successfully completed a task. Try to stay calm and remind the child that he/she will have another opportunity the next day.
- Do not punish the child by removing stickers from the Snake. It is enough that the child can lose out on stickers by not completing his/her tasks.



NEGATIVELY STATED TASKS

Make a list of what your child can do instead. Some tasks have to be put in negative terms for clarity's sake, such as "Don't push others." In these cases, the child needs to know what he/she can do instead. By making a list together with him/her, you will be helping your child identify other strategies.

The important thing, naturally, is not that the child uses one of the behaviors on the list, but that he/she does not push others. The list contains suggestions for things the child can do instead.

Set a time limit! You must set a time limit for tasks stated in negative terms. How long can your child go without pushing someone? The child should be able to succeed at the task at least half the time. The child should clearly understand how much time is involved. It is often better to express the time frame in practical terms, rather than hours or minutes. The task might be described like this: "Do not push others in the halls before school starts."

That does not mean it is okay to push others later on - but only that this is the time during which you have decided the child must not push others in order to earn a sticker. This is only the first step, for which the child should receive lots of praise and attention. When the child is able to complete the task most of the time, you can make it more difficult by extending the time frame.



HOMEWORK - SESSION 4

One-on-one time

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PIP

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The Snake. What tasks are you planning to give your child?

1:

2:

3:

BEFORE SESSION 5

The Snake. How many stickers has your child collected so far?

One-on-one time and PIP

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