

# NEWS FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

## *Special Edition*

### **Behavior Mini Series - Part IV**

#### **Establish a Continuum of Strategies to Acknowledge Appropriate Behavior**

A fourth critical feature of classroom management is using a continuum of evidence-based strategies that focus on identifying and recognizing appropriate classroom behavior. These strategies range from simple tools such as contingent specific praise to more complex such as class-wide group contingencies to acknowledge appropriate behavior. Research has identified the four strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior: Specific, contingent praise, group reinforcement contingencies, token economies, behavior contracts.

**Specific, contingent praise:** This is a positive statement that is delivered by an adult when a desired behavior occurs. The positive praise is contingent to inform students specifically of what they did well.

- Evidence indicates that delivering this praise for academic behavior increases correct responses of students, work productivity and accuracy, language and math performance on classwork, and academic performance. This strategy can be used to acknowledge appropriate social behavior as well. When delivered in this manner, studies have found increases in on-task behavior, student attention, compliance, positive self-referent statements, and cooperative play.
- Praise should be specific and describe the desired behavior. It is also beneficial to provide the praise in conjunction with established classroom rules. An example of this might be:

*"Great, you remembered to raise your hand and wait to be called on."*

Delivering this type of specific praise rather than simply saying "good job" will help students to discriminate correct versus incorrect responses and better understand how to engage in more appropriate behaviors in the future.

***"Behavior-specific praise is proven effective but is often underutilized."***

*(Kalis, T., Vannest, K., & Parker, R., 2007)*

***"Teachers who disregard the appropriate behaviors of children and focus more on inappropriate behaviors will more than likely continue to engage in those problem behaviors."***

*(Conroy et. al., 2009)*

**Group reinforcement contingencies and token economies:** These have broad evidential support when used in classroom settings. Use of these strategies has been found to increase positive and decrease negative verbal interactions, decrease transition time, increase achievement, appropriate behavior, and peer social acceptance, increase student attention, decrease inappropriate behavior, talk-outs, and out-of-seat behavior, and increase student preparedness for class and assignment completion. Pairing reinforcement contingencies and token economies with a continuum of other strategies such as establishment and instruction of classroom rules, self-management and peer monitoring, social skills training, individual contingencies, positively stated classroom rules and active teacher supervision has been found to improve appropriate classroom behavior.

Group contingencies offer a way for the teacher to reinforce the entire class or a smaller group of students for completing tasks and engaging in appropriate classroom behaviors and other behaviors. They are advantageous because they can support multiple students at once. This makes them more efficient than individual reward systems and less time is spent on monitoring.

There are three main types of group contingencies:

- Dependent: the outcome for the whole group depends on the behavior of a smaller subset of that group
- Interdependent: the outcome for the whole group depends on the behavior of all students
- Independent: the outcome of each student depends on his or her behavior

### Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Before you begin an activity that you anticipate will be difficult for students, or hard to engage them in, consider using a group contingency.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. First, determine which target behaviors will be acknowledged. Examples of appropriate classroom behaviors are when students are helpful to others, or raise their hands without talking.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Choose which reward the students will work toward or earn access to (end of the week recess, game day, etc.). You can learn the students' interests and motivations by completing a reinforcer assessment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Decide what you will use to count the appropriate behaviors (marble jar, sticker chart, letters on the board, etc.).
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Decide how many counters will be needed to reach the goal (fill up the entire marble jar, 25 stickers on the sticker chart, spell the teacher's name on the board, etc.).
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. The first day you use it, teach the students how the contingency works. Provide specific examples of behaviors ("I'm looking for groups who are in their seats, quiet mouths, with eyes on me").
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Provide the reinforcement for the target behavior to the entire class or group ("Great job, Group 3. Everyone has their materials out and ready to go. Your group earns a point").

To increase effectiveness of this strategy:

- Strategically group students who work well together
- Deliver positive behavior-specific praise
- Avoid calling out specific students or challenging behaviors ("Great job working quietly and together, group 3").
- Structure the classroom to support group contingencies (students select group names)
- Increase class buy-in by changing reinforcers often, keeping their preferences in mind
- Implement a different type of group contingency. There are three types: dependent, independent, and interdependent
- Be aware that an individual student may sabotage their group's responses

Token economies are a reinforcement system in which students earn tokens such as points, poker chips, etc. that are contingent upon desired behavior. These can be cashed in for a backup reinforcer such as a desired item, activity, attention from preferred people, etc.

To implement a token economy:

1. Select a tangible token that is durable and easy to manipulate (e.g., stickers, coins, points)
2. Create a sturdy, appropriate token board
3. Determine the criteria and rules for earning reinforcement and explain what specific behaviors are required of individual students. Obtain a baseline measure of their performance and set a goal that is close to that starting point.
4. Select high-quality reinforcers that the student can exchange for the tokens
5. Determine how many tokens are needed to earn reinforcement. Gradually increase the ratio of tokens needed to earn a reward as a student builds success in demonstrating the alternative or replacement behavior

**Behavior contracts** are written documents that specify a contingency (relationship between behavior and consequence). These contracts define the expected behavior and outcomes for engaging or not engaging in expected behavior. Behavior contracts have been found to increase student productivity, on-task behavior on daily assignment completion, school grades, and self-control.

To implement this intervention: The teacher identifies specific behaviors to select for the behavior contract. When possible, teachers should select behaviors that are positive, pro-academic, or pro-social. For example, a teacher may be concerned that a student frequently calls out answers during instruction without first getting permission from the teacher to speak. For the contract, the teacher's concern is restated positively. For example: "The student will participate in the class lesson and discussion, raising his hand and waiting to be called on before providing an answer or comment." It is beneficial to have the student participate in the selection of goals to increase their involvement in and motivation toward the behavior contract.

The teacher meets with the student to develop the behavior contract. (If appropriate, other school staff members and perhaps the student's parent(s) are invited to participate as well.) The contract should include:

- A list of student behaviors that are to be reduced or increased stated in positive, goal-oriented terms. Behaviors of focus should be operationalized and described in detail to prevent disagreement about student compliance. The teacher should also select target behaviors that are easy to observe and verify. For instance, the completion of class assignments is a behavioral goal that can be readily evaluated. If the teacher selects the goal that a child "will not steal pens from other students", though, this goal will be very difficult to observe and confirm.
- A statement or section that explains the minimum conditions under which the student will earn a point, sticker, or other tokens for showing appropriate behaviors. For example, a contract may state that "Johnny will add a point to his Good Behavior Chart each time he arrives at school on time and hands in his completed homework assignment to the teacher."
- The conditions under which the student will be able to redeem collected stickers, points, or other tokens for specific rewards. A contract may state, for instance, that "When Johnny has earned 5 points on his Good Behavior Chart, he may select a friend, choose a game from the play-materials shelf, and spend 10 minutes during free time at the end of the day playing the game."
- Bonus and penalty clauses (optional). Although not required, bonus and penalty clauses can provide extra incentives for the student to follow the contract. A bonus clause usually offers the student some type of additional 'pay-off' for consistently reaching behavioral targets. A penalty clause may prescribe a penalty for serious problem behaviors; e.g., the student disrupts the class or endangers the safety of self or others.
- Areas for signature. The behavior contract should include spaces for both teacher and student signatures, as a sign that both parties agree to adhere to their responsibilities in the contract. Additionally, the instructor may want to include signature blocks for other staff members (e.g., a school administrator) and/or the student's parent(s).

(Intervention Central)

## EXAMPLE



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Sources:

[https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5d3725188825e071f1670246/5d6ff9631919dc0c79fc0bee\\_e1\\_simonsen.pdf](https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5d3725188825e071f1670246/5d6ff9631919dc0c79fc0bee_e1_simonsen.pdf)

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236785368\\_Evidence-based\\_Practices\\_in\\_Classroom\\_Management\\_Considerations\\_for\\_Research\\_to\\_Practice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236785368_Evidence-based_Practices_in_Classroom_Management_Considerations_for_Research_to_Practice)

[Group-Contingencies.pdf \(uw.edu\)](#)

[Evidenced-Based Practices: The Use of Token Economies as Conditioned Reinforcement \(odu.edu\)](#)

[Behavior Contracts | Intervention Central](#)

Conroy, M., Sutherland, K., Snyder, A., Al-Hendawi, M., Vo, A. (2009). Creating a positive classroom atmosphere: Teacher's use of effective praise and feedback. *Beyond Behavior*, 18-26.

Kalis, T., Vannest, K., & Parker, R. (2007). Praise counts: using self-monitoring to increase effective teaching practices. *Preventing School Failure*, 51(3), 20-27.



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