

Classroom Interventions for Children with Attention Deficit Disorder



Classroom Token Economy

Description

A token economy is an intensive, in-class positive reinforcement program for building up and maintaining appropriate classroom performance and behavior. A token program may be needed when other positive reinforcement programs, such as selective use of teacher attention or a home-based reinforcement program, are insufficient to motivate the student with Attention Deficit Disorder to behave and perform appropriately. When this is the case, a tangible reward program, managed by the teacher, may be needed. Tangible rewards can be conveniently managed through a token reinforcement program.

Token programs involve the distribution of physical tokens (for example, poker chips, stickers, stars, smiley faces, etc.) or points following appropriate behavior. The tokens or points can be accumulated throughout the day and exchanged for designated rewards at a specified time. A predetermined goal is set for the number of tokens or points required to earn a reward. The teacher or classroom aide is responsible for distributing the tokens and providing the reward.

Advantages

A token program is one of the most powerful behavioral interventions for improving school behavior. In children with ADD, the changes in classroom behavior can be comparable to those obtained by stimulant medications (O'Leary & O'Leary, 1976). Token programs allow for the use of more powerful incentives than are typically in place in the classroom. In addition, token programs have the advantage of providing more immediate rewards than home-based programs.

Limitations

A survey of teachers' classroom management practices showed that formal token programs were used for increasing appropriate behavior by about 30 percent of teachers, with an average frequency of use between "not at all" and "just a little" (Rosen, Taylor, O'Leary, & Sanderson, 1990). This result may simply reflect that such intensive in-class programs are not needed for the majority of students. However, it could also indicate that the technique is too time consuming and difficult to manage, given teachers' other responsibilities. Furthermore, while behavioral interventions sound simple, their implementation can be difficult. For this reason, teachers may need additional training or consultation with a person trained in behavioral interventions in order to successfully implement a token reinforcement program. In one study, a classroom teacher was able to successfully manage a classroom wide token program with 18 hyperactive children after consultation with a behavioral specialist who helped initiate the program (Robinson, Newby, & Ganzell, 1981). The steps involved in establishing a token economy program are outline below.

Implementation

Step 1: Select behaviors to target for change.

The teacher should choose two to four of the most important problem behaviors to target for change. Additional behaviors can be substituted in as the student's behavior changes. It is

important for these behaviors to be defined clearly. The characteristics of well-defined behavior are described and examples provided in Table 1.

Characteristic	Recommended Examples	Not Recommended
Define in clear, specific, and observable terms	"Turned in homework on time" "Obeyed class rules"	"Was good today" "Had a bad day"
Positively stated when possible	"Played well with the other children" "Was prepared for class"	"Hit the other children" "Unprepared for class"
Represent academic products rather than classroom behavior or conduct	"Percentage of math completed" "Percent of accurately completed reading"	"Stayed seated" "Stayed on task"

Table 1. Characteristics of Well-Defined Behavior

First, the behavior should be defined in such a way that it is clear to the child and everyone else involved when the behavior occurs. The behavior should be clear, specific, and observable. A good rule of thumb is: if the behavior can be counted and two different people observing the behavior can agree when it occurs, then behavior is probably well-defined. Vague target behaviors make it difficult for teachers to monitor them and children to know when they have performed them.

Second, a token reinforcement program is designed to be positive and motivational, focusing on increasing desired behaviors. Behaviors targeted for change should be defined in terms of what the child should do, rather than what the child should stop doing.

The third characteristic relates to targeting classroom products rather than conduct or process behaviors. Programs targeting disruptive behavior or academic "process," such as staying on task, sitting still, or staying seated, are successful in changing these behaviors, however, they do not necessarily lead to increased work productivity (Barkley, 1990). Programs targeting the products of academics can lead to increased productivity, as well as improvements in behavior. It should be acknowledged that the behavior of some children with ADD can be quite disruptive to the classroom and may need to be the target of change. It is recommended that targeting behaviors involving classroom conduct be done only after a period of rewarding academic productivity.

Step 2: Develop a method for keeping track of tokens or points.

The teacher must develop a method for keeping track of the tokens or points. It is recommended that physical tokens be used for young children (4 to 7 years old), such as poker chips, stars, stamps, or stickers (Barkley 1990). These tokens can be given to the child to place in a container at or near the child's desk. Some young children may get distracted by these chips and it may be necessary to place them out of reach, such as in a fabric pouch attached to the back of the desk or placed in some other location. For older children, points, numbers, or check marks can be made on a card placed on their desk or in a journal.

Step 3: Identify powerful rewards.

The identification of powerful rewards is critical to the success of a token program. In order for the reward to be motivating, it must be perceived by the child as desirable and worth working for. One

way to assure that the rewards are meaningful is to involve the children in the process of generating a list of potential rewards. Another method of identifying meaningful rewards is to observe what the children do in their free time. Behaviors that children engage in frequently can be used as rewarding activities. Parents also can be helpful in identifying favored activities. In addition, there may be some classroom responsibilities that children may find rewarding, such as assisting the teacher or erasing the chalkboard. For children with ADD, new rewards should be continually rotated into the reward "menu" in order to keep the rewards meaningful. What may be rewarding to a child one week may be less so the next week. Examples of potential school rewards are listed in Table 2.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to hand held video games ● Free time in class ● Computer time ● Small toys ● Field trips ● Working on a bulletin board ● Being in charge of sharing time ● Passing out books ● Acting as a line leader ● Leading the morning pledge to the flag ● Leading songs ● Being captain of a team ● Helping in the cafeteria ● Assisting the custodian ● Helping the librarian ● Snacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extra recess time ● Playing games ● Legos ● Art projects ● Access to science area ● Helping correct work of others ● Erasing the chalkboard ● Running the copy machine ● Stapling papers together ● Feeding the fish or animals ● Raising or lowering flag ● Emptying wastebaskets ● Operating a projector ● Correcting papers ● Giving message over the intercom ● Going to the library ● Using a typewriter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cutting paper ● Running errands ● Helping in the school office ● Cleaning erasers ● Writing lesson plans on the chalkboard ● Watering plants ● Tutoring a less able child ● Collecting papers ● Getting out gym equipment ● Taking roll ● Working with clay ● Listening to the radio with a earphone ● Visiting the counselor or principal
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Table 2. Potential Classroom Rewards

Step 4: Establish goals.

The next step is to determine an appropriate goal, or number of tokens or points needed to obtain the reward. It is important to initially set the goal at a level that is easily achieved. If the goal is set too high, the child may perceive it to be unachievable and may not put forth the effort. The best way of establishing an appropriate starting goal is to keep track of how often the child performs the desired behaviors for a one week period prior to starting the program. The starting goal should be set just above this "baseline" level of performance. For example, if a student was completing 40 percent of her assigned work before intervention, then an appropriate starting goal might be 50 percent. This reasonable starting goal will allow the child to obtain success and experience the reward of appropriate behavior early in the program. The goal can be gradually increased over time.

Step 5: Explain the program to the child.

The program should be explained to the child at a neutral time. The behaviors targeted for change and how to successfully perform the behaviors should be discussed. In addition, the goal for earning the rewards and when the rewards will be given should be discussed.

Step 6: Teacher provides feedback.

The teacher should decide how the tokens will be distributed. They can be given for each occurrence of a desired behavior or at specified intervals. For example, if a teacher is trying to increase a child's raising of hand before speaking, a token can be given each time the child

performs this behavior. If work productivity is targeted, the child can earn a token for every five math problems completed accurately. It is essential that the teacher reward the target behaviors with tokens in a consistent and accurate manner. In addition, the teacher should use frequent praise and social attention for appropriate behavior throughout the day and when dispensing the tokens. A punishment technique called response cost can be built into the program. This technique involves the loss of tokens, points, or privileges following the occurrence of some inappropriate behavior or failure to meet some specified goal. However, it is recommended that response cost be included only after the program has been tried with just rewards for several weeks.

Step 7: Teacher provides reward.

At a predetermined time, the teacher should review the child's progress toward the goal. If the child obtained the goal for the day, the child should be allowed to choose a reward from the reward menu. If the child fails to obtain the goal for the day, the child can be informed in a matter-of-fact manner that s/he did not earn the reward for the day. Avoid reprimands or "corrective" critical statements.

Step 8: Changing the program.

When the child's behavior improves to a desired level for a period of time, the program can be changed in a number of ways. The number of tokens required for a reward can be increased. For example, initially, a child may be allowed to exchange tokens several times per day. As the behavior improves, the tokens can be exchanged once per day. In addition, after progress has been made on the original target behaviors, new problem behaviors can be substituted in as needed. When making changes to the program, praise the child for the success and explain the changes and expectations. If the child's behavior worsens during these changes and does not improve after a period of time, return to the previous system.

References

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