Tip Sheet: Token Economy  
(and 100 Squares)

Definition

- Tokens are
  - Generalized reinforcers
  - Earned through demonstration of target behavior
  - Exchangeable for a backup reinforcer valued by student
  - Common tokens: points; stickers; check marks

- A token economy is “a system of behavior management in which tangible or token reinforcers, such as points, plastic chips, metal washers, poker chips, or play money are given as rewards and later exchanges for back-up reinforcers that have value in themselves (e.g., food, trinkets, play time, books)” (Kerr & Nelson, 2010, p. 414)

Other Terminology
Token Reinforcement Systems (Alberto & Troutman, 2009)

Rationale

- Tokens are easier to give than other tangible reinforcers.
- Since students can exchange tokens for a variety of reinforcers, students are less likely to become satiated or bored with the reinforcer.
- Giving a token to a student is a means to give the student positive feedback about his/her behavior and facilitate positive student/teacher interactions.
  - Juron, you were able to walk away from that negative comment without getting involved in a fight. Here is a ticket for the class lottery.
  (Kerr & Nelson, 2010)

Implementation:
Token Economy can be used whole-class or individually

Steps (Kerr & Nelson, 2010)
1) Identify and define target behavior (goals).
2) Identify and define problem behaviors.
3) Select tokens, token value, and reinforcement intervals.
4) Determine backup reinforcers & fines.
5) Decide how to store and monitor tokens.
6) Determine time intervals for earning and exchanging.
7) Teach, implement, and monitor program.

Considerations (Kerr & Nelson, 2010)
- Make sure definitions are clear to teachers and student.
- Select tokens that are durable and last.
  - Types of tokens: Poker chips, sticker, play money, hole punched in card, stamps, connect the dots picture, puzzle pieces
- Select or design tokens that cannot be counterfeited or are easily accessible to students.
- Make sure students are able to experience and access reinforcement.
**Individual Student Example**

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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raise Hand</td>
<td>Stay in Seat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
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Sue is a 7-year old girl with intellectual disabilities who loves being in circle time with her friends. However, she frequently gets out of her seat, talks out, and interrupts the instruction during circle time. A token economy was used to reduce talking out and interruptions in addition to increasing staying in seat and raising hand to be called on. The token was a punch on a card (see above), and reinforcement intervals were one-min. Each minute that there were no instances of talking out/interrupting and out of seat, Sue would get a punch. After 5 punches, Sue would get to get out of her seat and give a peer a ‘high five’. Eventually, the intervals were lengthened to increase the time between delivery of the tokens (i.e., punch on the card)

**Classwide Example: 100 Squares** (Sprick, Garrison, & Howard, 1998)

- 100 Squares is a way to acknowledge and reinforce whole class behavior
  - Useful to improve a particular class rule (e.g., remaining on task)
  - “Catch class being good”: class earns tokens with numbers that are filled in on a chart. When 10 square in a row (horizontally, vertically, diagonally) are filled in, class earns reward

Implementation Steps for 100 Squares:

1. Identify and define target behavior (e.g., staying on task).
2. Post 100 squares chart in prominent location in classroom.
3. Determine type of token (e.g., small tags, popsicle sticks, etc).
4. On each token, write a number 1 – 100.
5. Put tokens in a container; also have a container for the tokens that have been drawn (discard container).
6. Explain token economy to class.
7. Begin the token economy:
   a. When you catch students displaying the target behavior, ask a student to draw a token;
   b. Fill in or color on the chart the number of squares as identified on the token;
   c. Put the token in the “discard” container;
   d. Class earns reward when 10 squares in a row have been filled in.
8. Once students earn reward, start the square over.
9. Alternate students who draw tokens so all students eventually get a turn.
10. When just beginning 100 squares, have multiple drawings a day.
11. Never has a drawing unless all students are demonstrating the target behavior
12. After students have earned several rewards, modify the chart to be 11 X 11 so more time is needed to earn reward
Evidence
Token economies have been used in general and special education settings across a variety of students with and at-risk for disabilities, including developmental disabilities (Alberto & Troutman, 2009)

Settings
- Self-contained and resource (Spriggs et al., 2007)
- Inclusion and general education (Lien-Thorne & Kamps, 2005; Shogren et al., 2011)

Behaviors
- Academics (Connell & Witt, 2004)
- Play (Arntzen et al., 2003)
- Self-Management (Cavalier et al., 1997)
- Task Engagement (Shogren et al., 2011)

Note: The above citations do not represent a comprehensive review of the literature.

References


