Family Reward Systems

Incentives for Remote Learning

What we will cover

-Where we are now?
-Types of reinforcement/punishment
-Bribes vs. Rewards
-Intrinsic Reinforcement
-Token Economy
-Breakdown of rewards
-Troubleshooting
-Sample schedule

Image by Tim Mossholder

We are home and resting AND we have never worked harder and are exhausted.

We are meditating AND freaking out on our kids.

We are acknowledging the silver linings AND we are in the throes of profound grief.

We are organizing and cleaning and gardening AND we are drinking too much, eating too much, and wishing we could just go see our friends.

Both. And.

This is the moment we must LET GO of convention and constraints. This is the moment we must let go of the shoulds, the coulds, and the pressures of self-inflicted guilt.

There is so much pressure right now to do and be a certain way, and yet none of us have done this before. Who is to say there is a right way to live through a pandemic?

Sacred Chill West

Reinforcement vs. Punishment

B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning Model: Behavior that is followed by pleasant or desirable consequences is likely to be repeated, while behavior that is followed by undesirable consequences is less likely to be repeated (McLeod, 2018). (Reinforcement=increase, punishment=decrease)

1. Positive reinforcement: a desirable stimulus is introduced to encourage certain behavior. (praise from adult for completed work)
2. **Positive punishment**: an undesirable stimulus is introduced to discourage the behavior. (touch a hot stove and feel pain)
3. **Negative reinforcement**: an undesirable stimulus is removed to encourage the behavior. (get up from table once two bites of broccoli eaten)
4. Negative punishment (also called extinction): a desirable stimulus is removed to discourage the behavior. (siblings get in fight, favorite toy taken away)

Types of Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement refers to the introduction of a desirable/pleasant stimulus after a behavior. Desirable stimulus reinforces the behavior, making it more likely that the behavior will reoccur. Linking privileges or rewards to behavior expectations is a powerful way to improve behavior

1. **Natural reinforcers**: reinforcers that occur directly as a result of the behavior (e.g., a student studies hard and does well on her exams, resulting in good grades).
2. **Token reinforcers**: those that are awarded for performing certain behaviors and can be exchanged for something of value (e.g., parents devise a reward system in which the child earns stars, points, or some other token that they can save up and turn in for a reward).
3. **Social reinforcers**: those that involve others expressing their approval of a behavior (e.g., a teacher, parent, or employer saying, "Good job!" or "Excellent work!").
4. **Tangible reinforcers:** reinforcers that are actual physical or tangible rewards (e.g., cash, toys, treats; Cherry, 2018).

5 examples of Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is perhaps the most widely used method of conditioning, and there are many examples you will likely be familiar with:

- A dog trainer giving a dog a biscuit when she performs a trick;
- A father providing his child with a deck of cards for picking up his toys;
- A teacher handing out gold stars to children that turn in their homework on time;
- A babysitter telling kids "Great job!" when they put away the dishes;
- A boss offering her employee a raise when he goes above and beyond on a project.

Positive Reinforcement Schedule

A positive reinforcement schedule is a plan that defines how you will go about encouraging the behavior

1. **Continuous schedule:** the behavior is reinforced after each and every occurrence (this schedule is hard to keep up on since we are rarely able to be present for each occurrence).
2. **Fixed ratio**: the behavior is reinforced after a specific number of occurrences (e.g., after every three times).
3. **Fixed interval**: the behavior is reinforced after a specific amount of time (e.g., after three weeks of good behavior).
4. **Variable ratio**: the behavior is reinforced after a variable number of occurrences (e.g., after one occurrence, then after another three, then after another two).
5. **Variable interval:** the behavior is reinforced after a variable amount of time (e.g., after one minute, then after 30 minutes, then after 10 minutes).

Bribes vs. Rewards

Bribes

-Both bribes and rewards offer something in exchange for a desired behavior, but the *way* they are offered is different.

-Unlike a reward, bribes aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when you are in the middle of a crisis. For example, you're in the grocery store checkout line when your child decides to have a complete meltdown. To advert disaster, you offer to buy her a sucker if she'll stop the tantrum and be good.

-Although bribes can be helpful with managing stressful situations, the long-term consequences outweigh any benefit. Bribes teach children that they can get something they want by acting out. Instead of teaching them how to comply, it is teaching them that they can get more by *not* complying.

Rewards

-A reward is something that is given *after* an achievement.

-Rewards are determined ahead of time so that your child knows what to expect. It puts the parent, in the driver's seat and stops any desperate negotiating in the heat of the moment.

-Much like your job's paycheck, rewards provide a concrete and positive incentive for doing a good job.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is the desire to take on a task simply because it is enjoyable and interesting, rather than for a reward. In terms of education, this would mean that students are motivated to study and engage in course work because it stimulates them instead of simply completing an assignment to receive a good grade.

-Help students visualize success: Imagine summer or graduation, what the end of the year will look and feel like with all work completed. Talk about what they are doing, how the are feeling, maybe even draw it.

-Discuss what students want to be when they grow up: What does it take to reach this goal? What subjects would they use in real life?

-Empower students with the freedom of choice: With remote learning, having multiple subjects per day can seem intimidating. Reframe the idea of remote learning as students feeling powerful and being in charge of what they learn and in what order.

-Discuss which subjects students enjoy and why? Subjects that students find individually fulfilling can be recognized as intrinsically motivating. Define this feeling discuss with students how to try and duplicate this feeling in other subjects. (i.e. if student loves art, but struggles with math, can students incorporate drawing into their math work?)

-Ask students to share the work they have done and give LOTS of enthusiastic positive praise.

Intrinsic Reinforcement from External Motivators

-External motivators (incentives/rewards) can transition to internal motivation

-As students develop fluency with rule following behaviors, the system can be gradually faded to much less frequent feedback, and finally stopped as intrinsic reinforcement (internal satisfaction with personal performance) takes over.

-When students reach small or large milestones, define and acknowledge positive emotions associated with hard work and success (i.e. proud, happy, motivated,excited, etc)

- Stagger rewards so they happen less often, increase amount of points needed to earn rewards, eventually have students "graduate" from external motivators

Bringing in a Token Economy

Within an educational setting, a token economy is a system for providing positive reinforcement to a child or children by giving them "tokens" for completing tasks or behaving in desired ways.

Why should I do it:

- Provides students with positive feedback
- Students respond to positive reinforcement best
- Helps reinforce positive behaviors and expectations
- Provides incentive
- Increases motivation, buy-in, and effort
- Produces a challenge with a "pay-off"
- Improves behavior and academics
- Produces immediate and quick results
- Provides a visual concrete reason for students to work toward behavioral and academic goals

Tips for an Effective Token Economy

Use pennies, plastic poker chips, or marbles for tokens (or tallies on a chart to cash in for tokens). Make sure your child can't access the tokens. You don't want them adding their own marbles to the ones they've earned from you.

Help your child find a way to store his tokens. If your child creates a special jar or box to keep his tokens in, he'll be extra motivated to earn more. Kids love to count, shake and look at their tokens.

Keep the token economy system positive. Make sure your child knows a token economy system is about rewarding his good behavior. It shouldn't be about punishing him when he makes a mistake.

Use a lot of [rewards that don't cost money](#). They can include things such as picking what to eat for dinner, going for a walk, or getting an extra bedtime story. Get your child involved by requesting his input into what rewards he would like to earn.

Allow for Individualization: Criteria for earning reinforcers can be tailored to individual support needs based on frequency of token delivery. You can also individually alter criteria for earning the token at a specific time based on analysis of student needs.

Key Concepts of a Token Economy

1. **Tokens = tangibles, like marbles, poker chips, board game pieces** – they are not meaningful alone - their value is in the things that they can get with them, similar to how we earn money. Tokens can be given immediately and easily. They can be effective as an intermediate small reward, bridging the gap from positive behavior to the delivery of the more significant reward, especially during times of remote learning when small marks of acknowledgement can build on larger rewards. Tokens can be traded for many different rewards and thus help maintain a child's interest and motivation.

2. **Choose up to three behaviors to address at one time**. Pick a behavior that your child is already doing well, one behavior that needs a little improvement, and one challenging behavior. (i.e. if child regularly makes bed, add in to reward chart to increase confidence and momentum for earning tokens)

3. **Frame the desired behaviors in a positive way**. Instead of saying, "Don't be loud during learning time" create a goal like, "Use a quiet voice while remote learning is in session." State what behavior you want to see so you can reward the good behavior with a token.

4. **Break the day down into smaller chunks of time when necessary**. You might reward your child for meeting his goals in the morning, during the afternoon, and during the evening. Waiting all day to earn a token can seem like too big of a goal and many children will lose interest.

5. **Physically hand a token to your child whenever you can and he earns one**. Provide immediate reinforcement for good behavior by giving your child a token for meeting his goals. (If this is not possible, use a tally system to keep track during the day to trade in for tokens later. Bonus tokens can be given immediately when able to make time during the day)

6. **Create an appealing reward menu with a variety of items**. Offer rewards worth a variety of point values to keep it exciting. Extended bedtime (by 5 minutes) might be worth 20 tokens, but choosing something from the dollar store might be worth 100 tokens, for example.

7. **Clear and Observable.** Define the behavior, when it is expected, and how fast it is expected to be completed

Establish a Baseline and Goals

Establish The Baseline

-Go over each subject and how long child should typically take for each one. Break subject down into two smaller chunks of time, with self care rewards in between. If there is a longer project, or ongoing assignment, add as separate subject with how long to work on it each day. If something is not complete, simply leave the box blank. It is not recommended to put any negative words or symbols such as "No" or a frowning face.

-The end of the first weeks total of daily points will be your baseline, students can set goals from there

Step 2: Establish a Goal

- *Daily goal and reward system*: Let's say the maximum number of points your child can earn each day with the chart is 22. Suppose your child currently gets about 10 check marks each day. It is not reasonable to ask your child to immediately begin getting 22 check marks each day. You want to start where he is and slowly work forward. You might make it a goal for your child to get 15 checkmarks per day next week. Each day your child reaches 15 checkmarks next week, he would earn a reward such as an extra 15 min of screen time.

-*Weekly goal and reward system:* You could also offer weekly rewards. You count up the baseline total of checkmarks during the first week- let's say 50 for the week as an example. For the next week you might set a goal for your child to earn 65 checkmarks. If he gets 65 or more checkmarks next week, this would earn him a larger reward on the weekend such as downloading a new game.

Rewards

-**Variety**: Keep it interesting. Children can get bored quickly with any given reward and lose motivation. The child needs a menu of rewards, including small, medium and large, so they can have instant gratification daily or save up for something over time.

 -**Child should help select rewards**, and rewards should be rotated or changed frequently to maintain interest -Caregivers should show enthusiasm when giving the rewards. Provide specific labeled praise when tokens and rewards are given.

-**Include rewards that fit into family's existing routine** when possible, to minimize things that caregivers need to buy. Rewards can be activities, not "things". (i.e. board game when homework is completed on time) are better than options that take extra time and effort to provide (i.e. an outing, toy).

-**Don't be stingy with tokens!** At first, reward every time the behavior occurs. As behavior improves, increase the cost of rewards, reduce value of tokens, or give fewer tokens. ONLY give out rewards when earned, i.e., child does the target behavior. Freebies reduce the potency of the rewards.

-**Assign point values:** Think about the point value for earning tokens. If the child can earn 6 points (tokens) a day, a daily reward should be worth 4 points.

-**Connect feelings of positivity**, being happy, and proud when accomplishing a goal- SEPERATE- from tangible reward.

Bonus Points and Intermittent "Surprise" Reinforcers

-Intermittent Reinforcement has been extensively studied as a technique to maintain and generalize positive behavior to new environment.(Sulzer-Azaroff & Mayer, 1991).

-Family members can periodically award bonus tokens/points based on highlighting a specific achievement, such as three days with positive sibling interaction during a free time activity, or two subjects in a row of focused learning. The awarding must be unanticipated, and must be thoroughly explained to the student. This powerful technique both shapes behavior and communicates positive acknowledgement for efforts to gain or maintain a positive outcome.

-Can also be used to help reach goals during times when motivation is lacking, or when unable to check work after each subject

Troubleshooting Token Economy

1. Child doesn't care if they earn tokens
   a. Get child involved in picking reward, link privileges, keep it simple/easy enough to earn
2. Lose Track of Tokens
   a. Decorate special cup, keep extra tokens hidden from child, give extra tokens if your count matches count of child
3. Child gets upset when they don't earn a token
   a. Keep the <u>reward system</u> as positive as possible. Don't take away tokens for misbehavior. If they argue about not earning a token, don't engage in a power struggle, praise them when they handle frustration well and encourage them to try again.
4. Token system isn't fair to other children
   a. Each child will have different behavioral goals and individual charts should reflect that. Extra motivation can include telling the kids once everyone has earned 20 tokens, the family will go to the movies etc.
5. Child starts out motivated but loses interest fast
   a. Reward systems that are confusing or too difficult cause kids to lose interest fast. Make sure your child has the opportunity to earn up to several tokens per day.[1]
   b. Change the reward menu often to keep your child interested. The more items on the reward menu, the more likely he'll stay motivated.
6. If noncompliance and rule violations are happening frequently, caregivers can add these as targets, for example by adding bonus points at the end of the day if no behavior rules are violated. E.g., 2 bonus tokens at bedtime if no hitting all day

Reward Chart

Subject	Time	Time	Self Care Reward	How will I get help	Complete	Points
Math	20 min (2x)	20 min (2x)	snack/stretch	Study group		
Science	20 min (2x)	20 min (2x)	Call a friend	dad		
English	20 min (2x)	20 min (2x)	Creative break	Call a friend		
History	20 min (2x)	20 min (2x)	Lunch			
Jewish Studies	15 min (2x)	15 min (2x)	Get outside	Email teacher/Study group		
Hebrew	15 min (2x)	15 min (2x)	snack/stretch	Email teacher/mom		
PE	30 min		Do PE after hard subject	Ask a friend		
English project	15 min per day			Email teacher		

Total	

Completed subjects= 10 points Working during timer= 10 points Self Care= 5 points

Bonus points offered for: Problem solving, saying kind things to sibling, helping setup lunch/dinner, making bed, helping a friend

Daily Goal: 100 points

Reward Bank	
5 minutes extra bedtime	50 points
Pick a family movie	75 points
Family bike ride/walk	75 points
Family game	75 points
15 min extra screen time	Reach Daily goal

Sample of Reward Chart for small children

- Small children respond well to bright colorful charts with pictures and stickers to emphasize tasks being asked

- Tasks can include things like bath time, as well as academic tasks. This chart is more focused around desired behaviors, but it can be tailored to needs of your student
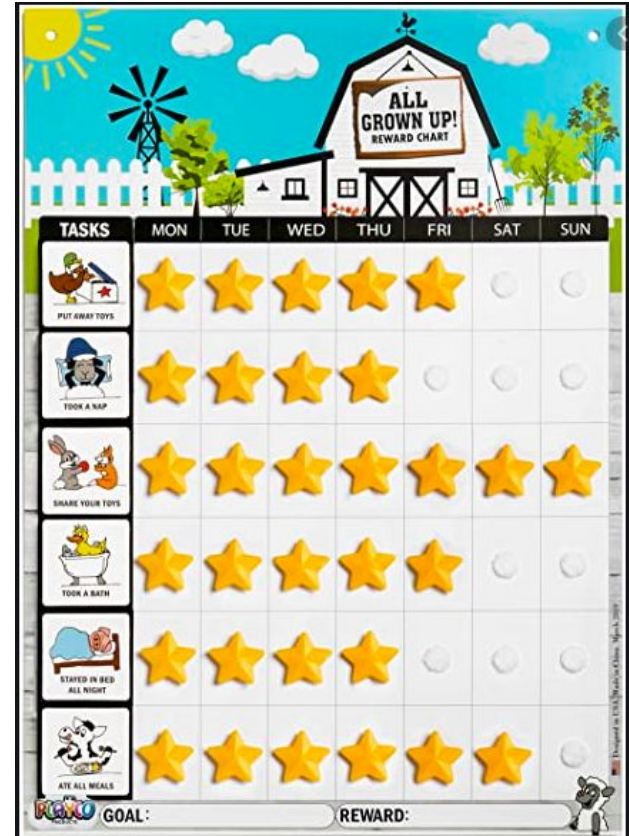
Reward Charts that fit your family needs

-Charts can be academically focused, centered around expected behaviors, chores around the house, or a combination of desired behaviors you wish to integrate into your home.

-Charts should be adjusted depending on age and range of average time work can be completed.

-Charts can be posted large and within view for the whole family to work towards family goals, as well as printed individually for each student.

- Now that you know the breakdown of what a chart can "should" include (i.e. desired behaviors, positive incentives, place to mark completed), you can create whatever system with whatever design you would like.