

# Behavior Contracts

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# Implementing Behavioral Strategies

## Purpose:

This set of behavioral strategies was developed for classroom teachers to use with students who may require academic and/or behavioral support. The strategies are intended to support teachers working with students with primary academic deficits and challenging behaviors. For students with more intensive behaviors, potential intensification strategies also are included.

## Structure:

Each strategy includes a description of the (a) purpose and overview; (b) type of strategy; (c) behavior(s) addressed; (d) setting; (e) required materials; (f) implementation procedures and considerations; (g) sample scripts or formats; (h) potential intensification strategies; and (i) additional resources (where available).

## Terminology and Definitions:

- 1. Reinforcement:** Actions to make a target behavior more likely to occur in the future.
  - **Positive Reinforcement:** Adding something pleasant or desirable (e.g., toy, food, attention) to make a target behavior more likely to occur.
  - **Negative Reinforcement:** Taking something unpleasant or undesired away (e.g., aspirin to relieve a migraine) to make a target behavior more likely to occur.
- 2. Reinforcers:** Incentives (either a reward or the removal of something undesired) that are given to students after they display an appropriate/expected behavior. Use of reinforcers should increase students' continued demonstration of the appropriate/expected behavior.
- 3. Punishment:** Strategies used to decrease or terminate students' demonstration of a challenging behavior, including time-out or loss of privileges.
- 4. Consequences:** Events that occur after the demonstration of any behavior. Consequences can be positive or negative.
- 5. Consequence Clause:** A clause that identifies specific consequences that will be delivered if students do not meet goals/success criteria.
- 6. Replacement Behavior:** An appropriate behavior that a student is taught to use to replace a challenging behavior. The replacement behavior should serve the same function as the challenging behavior.
- 7. Consequence Modification:** Strategies to encourage students' demonstration of an appropriate/expected behavior.
- 8. Antecedent Modification:** Strategies to prevent students' demonstration of challenging behavior by clearly defining appropriate/expected behaviors.
- 9. Schedule of Reinforcement:** Established rules or procedures that a teacher follows to deliver reinforcers.

**10. Intermittent Reinforcement:** Delivering reinforcers at random time intervals that do not follow a pattern.

**Considerations for Successful Implementation:**

- These strategies may coincide or be used along with other interventions/strategies (e.g., Check In Check Out).
- The strategies should be aligned with school- and class-wide expectations.
- The reinforcers should be aligned with the hypothesized function of student behavior (e.g., attention, escape, avoidance, sensory).
- When using behavior management systems that award students points for demonstration of appropriate/expected behavior, it is important not to take away points after students earn them. Taking away earned points diminishes their value and may cause students not to care about earning future points.
- When using consequence clauses that include a form of punishment (e.g., time-out, loss of privileges), it is important to accompany them with strategies to teach replacement behaviors and/or strategies that encourage student demonstration of appropriate/expected behavior.
- For students with more intensive behavior, individualize class-wide strategies (using the potential intensification strategies) and consult with a behavior specialist/team in the event that strategies are not resulting in progress.

**Examples of Reinforcers**

Tangible	Activity-Based	Social	Intangible
Tokens, stickers, posters, prize from a prize box, snack or favorite food item (if appropriate), coloring page, books	Extra time on computer, silent reading time, partner reading, allowed to be a leader, given a classroom job, assisting secretary or teacher	Tell a joke, lunch with teacher, positive phone call home, game with a friend, being a peer model for a younger student	Verbal praise, smiles, thumbs-up, giving eye contact, positive comments written on work

## Behavior Contracts

### **Purpose and Overview:**

Students and teachers agree on a common goal for addressing a problem behavior and develop a written agreement. The agreement should be written positively, stating what the student is expected to achieve for meeting the terms of the contract. Contracts should be easy to understand by teachers, parents, and students. Contracts should be for a short duration and be achievable in that time frame.

### **Type of Strategy:**

Antecedent modification and/or schedule of reinforcement strategy

### **Behavior(s) Addressed:**

Can be used to address any challenging behavior

### **Setting:**

Educational and home settings

### **Materials:**

- Writing utensil and paper or a typed document
- Point sheet, daily behavioral progress report, or Check In Check Out (CICO) monitoring sheet

### **Implementation Procedure:**

1. Develop a point sheet, behavioral progress report, or CICO monitoring sheet to use along with the behavior contract.
2. Identify the target behavior with the student.
3. Identify reinforcers that the student will work to earn (e.g., tell a joke, computer time, an activity, an item from a prize box).
4. Establish a schedule of reinforcement that is appropriate for student need. Start with more frequent reinforcement and fade over time.
5. Set a realistic performance goal with the student.
6. Write down the agreed-upon goal and have everyone involved in the development of the contract sign it.
7. Monitor the student's performance using the point sheet/progress report and modify the contractual goal, as needed.

## **Implementation Considerations:**

- Students should be involved in writing a behavior contract.
- Students need to choose a reinforcer that they want to work to earn.
- As students' needs and interests change throughout the year, revisiting the contract and reinforcers may be warranted.
- School-based contracts may be written on the back of the daily progress report.
- School-based contracts may require a parent signature, so that the school personnel know that the parent read the agreement.
- Target behaviors can range in specificity. For some students, adherence to school-wide expectations may be appropriate (e.g., being respectful, responsible, or safe), while for other students, more specified behaviors may need to be considered, such as the demonstration of a replacement behavior or social skill (e.g., asks for a break, raises hand, takes deep breaths to calm down).

## Sample Behavior Contracts

### Contract with Home-Based Reward:

We agree that whenever Anthony has a day at school when he earns six or more stars, he will receive one point at home. When he receives five points, he will be allowed to go to a movie of his choosing.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Anthony's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Expiration date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Anthony's mother's signature

### Contract with School-Based Reward:

If <insert student name> is safe and responsible and earns eight points during the day, then <insert student name> will be allowed to choose one of the following activities for the last 15 minutes of the day.

- ✓ Play a game
- ✓ Lay head down on desk
- ✓ Play cards
- ✓ Tell a joke
- ✓ Play on the computer
- ✓ Have a snack

<Insert student name> may only choose to do one of the above activities, nothing else.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's signature

## Potential Intensification Strategies:

- Behavior contracts may be used in conjunction with existing interventions/strategies (e.g., CICO or a social skills group) to include goal setting related to a targeted behavior.
- Behavior contracts also may be developed with families to support home-school partnerships and facilitate consistency across settings.
- When appropriate, behavior contracts can incorporate a self-management component to encourage student ownership.
- For students presenting with attention-seeking behavior, identify reinforcers that will allow students to gain attention (e.g., one-on-one time with a peer or teacher or allowing them to share something in front of the class).
- For students with more challenging behavior, include a “consequence clause” in the event that the student does not meet his or her goal. Identify consequences up front (e.g., if Johnny does not meet his goal, he will not receive additional time on the computer).
- Increase a student’s schedule of reinforcement to include more frequent reinforcers throughout the day (as identified by student need) or include a bonus reinforcer when a student exceeds his or her goal. Reinforcement schedules should be included in the contract.
- For students who are non-verbal or have limited cognitive skills, use a preference assessment to identify reinforcers and develop a contract and point sheet with visuals/pictures.
- Determine if the student has a skill deficit that inhibits his or her ability to demonstrate the appropriate/expected behavior and teach the required prerequisite skills for successful performance.

## Additional Resources:

- About Education website: <http://specialed.about.com/od/Positive-Behavior-Support/a/Behavior-Contracts-A-Weekly-Level-System-Contract.htm>
- Chandler, L. K., & Dahlquist, C. M. (2010). *Functional assessment: Strategies to prevent and remediate challenging behavior in school settings* (3rd ed.), pp. 151–152. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Intervention Central website: <http://www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-interventions/challenging-students/behavior-contracts>