

Establishing a Group Contingency Program

As was noted earlier, a group contingency behavior management program can be as simple as the statement “Class, if you are all in your seats, on-task, and quiet this morning, you may have 5 extra minutes of recess.” However, a little more structure than this can increase the effectiveness of the group contingency.

1. Decide which behaviors will be reinforced. As in any whole-class behavior modification program, the first step in setting up a group contingency is to establish a set of class rules.
2. Set up a developmentally appropriate point system. There are essentially three ways to implement a group contingency behavior management program. One is simply to rate class behavior each period or during each activity. That is, an elementary school class might receive 0 to 5 points during each individual instructional period such as reading, language arts, and math. A secondary school class might receive one overall rating each period or separate ratings for behavior and completed assignments. The class would then be rewarded each day or week if they exceeded a pre-established number of points.

Another way to set up a group contingency program is to rate the class at various times during the day. For example, you might set a timer to ring on the average of once every 10 minutes (but varying randomly from 1 to 20 minutes). If the whole class is conforming to class rules when the timer rings, then the class earns a point. The same program can be used without the timer if the teacher gives the class a point every 10 minutes or so if all students are conforming to class rules. Canter and Canter (1992) suggest that teachers use a bag of marbles and a jar, putting a marble into the jar from time to time whenever the class is following rules. Each marble would be worth 30 seconds of extra recess. In secondary schools, where extra recess is not possible, each marble might represent 30 seconds of break time held at the end of the period on Friday.

3. When behavior improves, reduce the frequency of the points and reinforcers. Initially, the group contingency should be applied every day. When the class’s behavior improves and stabilizes at a new level for about a week, you may change to giving rewards once a week. Ultimately, the class may graduate from the point-and-reward system entirely, though feedback and praise based on class behavior should continue.
4. Combine group and individual contingencies if necessary. The use of group contingencies need not rule out individual contingencies for students who need them. For example, students who continue to have problems in a class using a group contingency might still receive daily or weekly report cards to take home to their parents.