

Reinforcement that works
Introduction

The child that can delay gratification will operate in the school setting better than if reinforcement must be immediate. A token economy is a system in which the child receives delayed reinforcement represented by immediate token distribution. The token must represent something of value to the child. If he does not work for it, he probably does not consider it valuable enough and the reinforcement should be changed. Tokens are the “money” that the child uses to “buy” his rewards and can be presented in any number of forms. Objects such as pennies, stickers, or small cards with a star or (+) can serve as tokens. Tokens are then exchanged at a later time for the predetermined reward. Token distribution should be as unobtrusive as possible to avoid drawing undue attention to the child within the classroom setting.



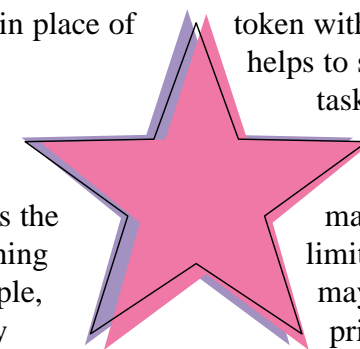
Domain

1. Immediate reinforcement
2. Short-term delayed reinforcement
3. Long-term delayed reinforcement
4. Accumulated reinforcement

Approach

Immediate reinforcement occurs when a token or a reward is given immediately after the target behavior is obtained. The purpose of token distribution is to substitute for immediate reinforcement. By offering a token in place of a reward, the child learns to delay gratification while still associating reinforcement with on-task behavior. The need for immediate reward diminishes as the child learns the value of the token to provide something he desires at a later time. For example, the child who is highly motivated by candy cannot receive chocolates for every task in the classroom setting without creating some problems among his peers. It is far better to offer him a token, such as a star on his checklist, which he receives for accomplishing the

target, and which he can then trade for chocolates after school. Token distribution is always accompanied by verbal reinforcement specific to the task. This concurrent administration of a token with specific praise for how it was earned helps to strengthen the association between on task behavior and reinforcement, thus contributing to repeated target behavior. Immediate reinforcement may be necessary for the child who has limited ability to delay gratification, or it may be used to add emphasis to a high priority target. Nevertheless, immediate reinforcement with items other than tokens can be obtrusive in the school environment and will distinguish the child from his peers. Tokens should replace immediate reinforcement as quickly as possible.



Chapter Summary

Activity-based checklist:

- Allows for individualization
- Offers immediate reinforcement
- Clearly delineates target behaviors
- Isolates mastered elements
- Identifies comprehension deficits
- Facilitates socialization

Skill-based checklist:

- Incorporates participation
- Promotes independence
- Develops information-seeking skills
- Fosters long-term success
- Expands socialization