

***Objective # 5: Token Economy Motivation System with Points and Levels:
Understand the classwide administration of the TIERS Token Economy
Motivation System***

A token economy is a system of managing and changing behavior based on the principles of operant conditioning. In a token economy system, the student learns to exhibit desired behavior in order to obtain access to privileges and preferred items and avoid behaviors that do not result in payoff. This means that students will be positively reinforced when exhibiting desirable, expected behaviors and punished or lose points when exhibiting undesirable, problem behaviors. Researchers and practitioners have repeatedly identified the following rationale for adopting an evidenced based token economy (Kazdin & Bottzin, 1972; Kaufman, 1997; Larzelere, et al, 2001):

- Serves as a teaching tool (immediate feedback)
 - Students continuously are reminded of the rules that are in effect as tokens are periodically earned
- External motivators help 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.
- Permits standardized and consistent treatment across classrooms
 - A standardized and consistent system across settings helps to eliminate differences in performance based on different rates of reinforcement and embedded teaching of prosocial behaviors and debriefing procedures

across classrooms. All programs serving students with EBD need to apply uniformity of treatment in order to be able to discern factors related to variability of outcomes for students in various classrooms.

- Allows for individualization
 - Criteria for earning reinforcers can be tailored to individual support needs based on frequency of token delivery and individually altering criteria for earning the token at a specific time based on analysis of student needs.
- Documents treatment delivery
 - Teachers keep records on the success and needs of students within the classroom, making the data apparent that implementation did occur as described.
- Allows teachers to manage multiple students at once
 - Both teachers and paraeducators are awarding tokens to students on an ongoing basis, and all students are aware of the amount of tokens needed to access privileges and purchase items and activities.

In order to reward or take away tokens consistently, based on appropriate or inappropriate behavior, it is necessary to establish a currency (i.e., the tokens) and corresponding reward menu (i.e., what the tokens can be exchanged for) specific to the classroom. Teachers then provide students with the currency or tokens to exchange for desirable items or activities contingent on their performance during the monitored time period. Examples of currencies that can be used in the classroom include good behavior bucks (simulated money currency), points accrued on a personal record sheet, progressive colors in the rainbow placed on an individual card, and actual tokens, such as small

wooden discs, small plastic bears, and so forth that are accrued in a personal container. The selected currency should match the developmental and chronological ages of the student. As you will see below, for the purpose of TIERS Model Classrooms, points are the preferred method given the probability the students are capable of understanding this abstract level of token. However, if any class has students with needs for less abstract tokens, this can be modified.

If an entire classroom has students who are chronologically or developmentally young, one of the less abstract tokens should be selected. However, the student must understand that the token stands for a behavior.

In behavior literature this would be termed, *stimulus equivalence*, whereby the token stands for a specific behavior that will result in access to specific items and events. (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007) The *stimulus equivalence* must have been developed if a token economy is to be successful. For example, if the student knows that a letter stands for a sound, or a graphic on a card stands for a location or item, the student has developed enough *stimulus equivalence* for token economy use. This conceptual skill is imperative in order for the token system to be effective. Thus, token economies for young preschool students or students with significant intellectual disability (aka individuals with mental retardation who have not developed skills in *stimulus equivalence*) are not recommended.

Motivation System within the Token Economy

A token economy only works as well as the motivation system that accompanies it. The motivation system consists of a menu of privileges, tangible items, and food items students can purchase or redeem with their tokens. The privileges, items, and food

included within the motivation system should be assigned values and prices so students understand how many tokens must be earned and saved to exchange for a preferred.

A reinforcer is an item or event with proven effect on behavior. That is, the student has demonstrated engaging in a behavior in order to access this reinforcer. A reward is that which we believe the student will wish to earn contingent on a desired response. Thus, all reinforcers are rewards, whereas some rewards have evidence they have worked with that student in the past, i.e., are reinforcers. Ideally all levels attained in a points and levels system will include items that have proven effects on specific students. Thus, in selecting items for rewards for a token economy, the TIERS Model classroom will wish to examine student preferences and possibilities. See chapter seven of the BSP Desk Reference for extensive material on reinforce selection menus and individual assessment tools located at: www.pent.ca.gov.

This aspect of the token economy and motivation system described thus far emphasizes reinforcing positive behavior by awarding "tokens" for meeting positive behavioral goals, but the system also includes *response cost* provisions. Response cost helps clarify for students that failure of being actively involved in earning tokens for a specific time period, or demonstration of a severe behavior, may result in a specific loss of points or tokens and, ultimately, the denial of access to preferred privileges, tangible items, and activities. See Appendix 3.2 for the Rainbow Club token system as an example of a token economy that incorporates the concept of response cost and can be used in classroom with students with EBD as an alternative to points earned, or as an organizing schemata within a points and levels system.

Recommended TIERS Token Economy Motivation System

The foundation of the Intensified Level I supports is a comprehensive token economy and motivation system involving *points as tokens* and *three stages of progressively greater access to privileges, responsibility, and freedom*. This TIERS model classroom component was influenced by the Boys Town motivation system, as well as other token economies implemented effectively in a variety of treatment settings for students with EBD. The programmatic components of the TIERS Token Economy Motivation System are discussed below: (a) points, (b) motivation system based on class store and (c) progressive stages of contingent access and (d) special provisions.

Points

Under the TIERS Token Economy Motivation System, students accrue and potentially lose points throughout the day based on their behavioral performance. The points, thus, serve as tokens and are exchanged for privileges and used to purchase preferred items and/or activities from a school or classroom store. Each student in the class is provided with a point sheet on a daily basis to track behaviors and corresponding point values, see Figure 3.2 for example TIERS point sheet. On the point sheet, there are columns to record the specific behavior, the positive or negative point value for the behavior, and staff member's initials. There are rows on the bottom of the page that allow the students to calculate the Positive Points, Negative Points, and Overall Points Earned.

--Insert Figure 3.2 here on TIERS point sheet--

Students must first use their points to purchase privileges on daily or weekly basis, depending on the specific stage of the token economy system they have achieved. The remaining points left over after purchasing the menu of privileges go into the student's banking sheet (see Figure 3.3 for example banking sheet), which is used to

purchase preferred tangible items, food, or activities from a class store. The banking sheet includes spaces to record the date, the nature of the transaction (e.g., deposit, money spent, or balance), and the amount of points. Students update their banking sheets at the end of each week in order to have an idea of the amount of points they have to spend on things in addition to the privileges they have earned.

--Insert Figure 3.3 here TIERS banking sheet--

The TIERS Token Economy point system was developed around the criterion of 1000 points per day as an indicator that the student had a “good and acceptable” day (i.e., the student should earn access to privileges). The assignment of points for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors throughout the day should be sensitive to this 1000 point criterion. Awarding too large or too small amount of points for single episodes of a desired behavior can alter the effectiveness of the system. The same holds true for assigning too large or too small point fines for single episodes of problem behaviors, unless the behavior is high in intensity (e.g., throwing an object at a peer, loudly swearing at the teacher, punching a peer). For high intensity episodes, the student should receive a high point fine that makes it nearly impossible to earn privileges that day or potentially longer time period, depending on the severity of the episode. The rough guideline is to provide approximately 100 points per appropriate behavior, unless it is exceptional, in which case a higher value may be given. The same guideline should apply to point fines for inappropriate behaviors. The 1000 point criterion is within the cognitive capabilities of most students with EBD. However, the 1000 point scale may be too difficult for some students with EBD to grasp. Therefore, it should be reduced to a 100 or 10 point criterion depending on the students’ ability to understand and calculate point totals. Apply the

same scaling. For example, if the behavior would earn 100 points in a 1000 point system, give 10 points in a 100 point system.

There should be at-least 12-15 specific behaviors with corresponding point values on each student's point sheet per day, see Figure 3.4 for a completed TIERS point sheet. Some of the point assignments can be delivered to the entire class; for example, if the entire class did an excellent job staying on-task during an independent practice activity. Periodically, and at the end of each day, the teacher and aides should review the assigning of points schedule. In a positive TIERS model classroom, there should be a ratio of *at least* 5 positive points given for every 1 negative point given. This means that students who engage in frequent problem behaviors will be awarded a higher number of positive and negative points on their point sheets in an attempt to maintain the 5:1 ratio of positives to negatives.

--Insert Figure 3.4 here on completed TIERS point sheet--

Motivation System: Class Store and Stages

The development of a class store is a major component of the motivation system, which includes preferred tangible items, food, and activities that can be purchased with points accrued beyond those needed to exchange for privileges. The classroom store should be opened up every week, or once every two weeks if that frequency is acceptable for maintaining or increasing positive behaviors and decreasing or eliminating problem behaviors, for students to purchase things with their points. Students may choose to roll over their points in order to save for more expensive things in the store. The store should include preferred tangible items, food/drinks, and activities identified by the students (not

the staff), and each thing should be assigned a specific point value that takes into account the points likely to be earned on a daily basis.

To develop a class store will require real money, which may or may not be readily available. To obtain money to create the store, it is recommended that staff hold fundraisers (e.g., car wash, run for money, candy sale) or seek donations from local businesses and prominent people in the community. Many local restaurants and fast food places, as well as movie theatres will give coupons for a free meal, item from a Dollar store, etc. if an educator approaches the store manager with either an ID card or a letter of introduction from district office, for academic achievement incentives. In exchange, the school personnel offer to allow the store to place a sponsorship add in the classroom newsletter the students produce every few weeks.

The better the store, the greater the incentive there will be for students to acquire and demonstrate the appropriate social and emotional skills necessary to earn points and create an orderly learning environment. In addition to the class store, stages should be provided.

Stages

The inclusion of stages within the TIERS Token Economy Motivation System grants access to increasingly more privileges as students are promoted from one stage to the next. The stages include the **Daily**, **Weekly**, and **Natural Stages**. These sequenced stages provide incentives to maintain improved performance and eventually earn access to privileges, responsibility, and freedom similar to that of students in general education. At each stage, different menus of privileges can be accessed and for varying amounts of time, depending on the specific criteria associated with each stage. Below is a discussion

of each stage's rationale, possible menu of privileges, criteria for accessing privileges, and promotion criteria. For a brief description of the stages see Table 3.2.

- **Daily Stage:** The Daily Stage is the beginning point for all students in the TIERS Token Economy Motivation System. It is the lowest stage in the system, so it is associated with access to least amount of preferred privileges. This motivates students to do well on the Daily Stage in order to graduate to the next stage in the token economy system and gain greater access to privileges, responsibility, and freedom. This stage is called the Daily Stage since students earn or lose privileges on a day-by-day basis. Below are specific decision criteria.
 - Delivering consequences and earning privileges: Students tally up their points at the end of each day. They must tally up with at-least 1000 points to exchange and earn privileges for *the next day*. Students who do not earn 1000 points to purchase privileges are denied access to the menu of privileges for the following day. However, although the student will not have privileges for that day, s/he will have the opportunity to earn them back the following day.
 - Menu of privileges: The menu of privileges capable of being earned by students on a the Daily Stage are designed to increase students' motivation to engage in desired behaviors, and avoid negative behaviors, to gain access to activities that are preferred and go beyond basic services provisions that protect the rights of all students (e.g., eating and drinking at scheduled time points, using the restroom, etc. These rights are never removed. See discussion below). The specific privileges include, but are not limited to:
 - Choice of special snack (beyond lunch or mandatory food provision)

- Access to free time and choice of activity or tangibles
 - Participate in classroom or outside games when time is allocated for that purpose
- Promoting students to the weekly stage: For students to be promoted to the Weekly Stage, they will need to earn daily privileges on 17 out of 20 days, of which the last 7 days have been consecutively earned (i.e., exchanged 1000 points a day for privileges on at-least 17 out of 20 days and for the last 7 days, 1000 points were earned each day).
- **Weekly Stage:** The Weekly Stage is intended to serve as an intermediate step for students who are demonstrating improvements in behavior and positive response to the interventions. Rather than earn privileges on a day-by-day basis, students on the Weekly Stage total up their points at the end of the week and exchange them for access to privileges for the *entire* next week. The privileges students on the Weekly Stage may access include all the privileges associated with the Daily Stage and more. The additional privileges provide students with more trust, responsibility, and freedom than those offered in the Daily Stage. Students, therefore, are motivated to be promoted from Daily to Weekly in order to gain access to better privileges.
 - Delivering consequences and earning privileges: Students on the Weekly Stage are given points on a daily basis, like students on the Daily Stage, but they do not have to tally them up and exchange them for privileges until the end of the week. They must have at-least 5500 (average of 1100 per day) in order to purchase access to weekly privileges for the following week. This means students either earn or do not earn privileges for the entire next week.

Therefore, students on the Weekly Stage have more to gain or lose based on their behavior. Students who earn weekly privileges can lose privileges for a given day during the week in which they have earned them if they exhibit high rates or severe behavior problems. This is designed to prevent students from misbehaving during the week in which they have earned privileges.

- Menu of privileges: The additional privileges provided in the Weekly Stage give students more personal freedom, trust, and access to potentially more enjoyable activities. The specific privileges include, but are not limited to:
 - All privileges associated with Daily Stage
 - Access to scheduled off-campus activities
 - First in line choice or first to leave
 - Eat lunch away from immediate auditory proximity of staff
 - Teacher helper duties and special privilege access (e.g., pass out papers, take things to the office, etc.)
 - Choice of available priority seating for learning activity
- Promoting students to the Natural Stage: In order to promote a student to the Natural Stage, they must be on the Weekly Stage and have earned the weekly menu of privileges for three consecutive weeks (i.e., exchanged 5,500 points for weekly privileges for a total of three weeks in a row).
- **Natural Stage:** The Natural Stage is the last stop in the TIERS token economy system. This stage is intended to provide students with the greatest access to privileges, responsibilities, and freedom. It is called the Natural Stage because rather than delivering artificial consequences in the form of points, students receive natural

consequences for their behavior. To achieve this, students who are promoted to this stage are no longer required to have a point sheet. The purpose of this is to mimic life outside of the TIERS classroom, where a point sheet is unlikely, and to provide an incentive for students on the lower stages of the token economy system. Also, in order for students in the TIERS classroom to be considered for reentry to a less restrictive environment, they must be on the Natural Stage, which serves as its own incentive for many students. Students are granted all the privileges of the previous stages, as well as privileges unique to this stage.

- Delivering consequences and earning privileges: On this stage, privileges are for students to lose based on natural consequences for inappropriate behavior. Students receive natural consequences, instead of point allocation or fines that are associated with whether the student earns privileges. The degree of the consequence should depend on the exceptionality, severity and/or frequency of the student's behavior. For example, if the student engaged in a dangerous behavior, such as punching another student, a natural consequence may be to demote the student back to the Weekly stage. Or, if the student cursed at the teacher, the teacher may choose to take away all privileges for two days as a natural consequence.
- Menu of privileges: The menu of privileges capable of being earned by students on the Natural Stage are designed to increase students' motivation to engage in desired behaviors, and avoid negative behaviors, to gain access to activities that are preferred and go beyond basic services provisions that protect the rights of all students (e.g., eating and drinking at scheduled time

points, using the restroom, etc. See below discussion). The specific privileges include, but are not limited to:

- All privileges associated with the Daily and Weekly Stages
- Privileges are the student's to lose. That is, the student is granted access to privileges all the time, unless taken away due to a problem behavior
- Leader(s) of the Self-Government Meeting
- Determine which classroom outings are voted on during Self-Government Meeting
- If not receiving Intensified Level II or III, acknowledgement that exit transition plan is approaching (see exit criteria Chapter 7)

--Insert Table 3.2 here stages of token economy motivation system---

Special Considerations

- **Protecting Basic Human Rights:** Regardless of whether the student is able to access privileges via the Token Economy System, all students are granted access to activities that protect their basic human rights. These activities include the right to go outside (but specific activities outside can be contingently earned or withheld), right eat and drink at regularly scheduled times, right to interact with others, and right use the restroom. The central premise is that students always have access to these basic human rights and they cannot be revoked even if they are exhibiting significant behavior problems. Therefore, the menu of privileges associated with each stage of the TIERS Token Economy Motivation System

must always represent activities that are above and beyond the listed basic human rights.

- **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). The staff can periodically award bonus tokens/points based on highlighting a specific achievement, such as three days with no disruptive behavior, or two episodes of appropriate peer interactions during a free time activity. 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.
- **Students Sabotaging Promotion:** Some students with EBD will develop a sense of comfort in the TIERS classroom or be highly anxious about returning to the less restrictive settings and, thus, view promotion up the stages of the token economy as a negative outcome. These students are at risk for sabotaging their promotion by engaging in problem behaviors that will prevent progress. For these students, specific plans should be developed to address the underlying concerns about possible reintegration into the less restrictive environment. Additional incentives may also need to be considered to motivate the student to maintain appropriate behavior for stage promotion. These students need to learn that reentry is multifactorial, and that their voice and that of the team is also considered.

- **Rapid Response Cost to Lower Stage based on High Intensity Problem**

Behavior: There will likely be students who are on the Weekly and Natural Stages and engage in such dangerous, destructive, or egregious behavior that they will require a swift and strong decision from staff to demote them to a lower stage. For instance, given the severity of the behavior, staff may decide that a student on the Natural Stage who gets in a physical altercation with another student should be demoted to the Weekly Stage.