



DIRECT BEHAVIOR RATING (DBR) AS AN INTERVENTION TOOL: INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

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The purpose of an incentive program is to provide more intense support for desirable behavior (and reduce undesirable behavior) over relatively brief periods of time. A behavioral contract typically outlines that an incentive (reward) will be provided to the student if he or she exhibits desirable behaviors or inhibits undesirable behaviors. For example, teacher attention should be contingent on hand raising rather than calling out during a lesson. Teacher attention is an incentive for hand raising; however, teacher attention should not incentivize calling out. In this way, effective incentive programs ultimately increase the likelihood of appropriate behavior while decreasing the occurrence of unwanted behavior. Within this type of behavior system, students are provided with timely feedback on their behavior, which allows them to increase appropriate behavior and decrease the occurrence of unwanted behaviors.

Because incentive programs work in conjunction with behavioral contracts, students are made aware of the expectations held for them within the classroom. The behavioral contract (written or verbal) is a contingency plan that outlines expected behaviors and the consequences that result from exhibiting undesired behaviors. Students are provided with feedback on their behavior. Desirable behavior should increase as a result of the praise and rewards received from the established incentive programs.

One reason for the effectiveness of incentive programs is that they give the student access to attention. Many students misbehave in class and at home in an effort to obtain attention from adults. Incentive programs establish a system in which the student receives adult attention through the provision of feedback, and most importantly, receives *positive* attention when behavioral expectations are met.

Why use Direct Behavior Rating (DBR) within incentive programs?

Direct Behavior Rating (DBR) is a flexible, feasible, and quick method for collecting data on student behavior. Thus it can serve as a beneficial complement to behavioral incentive programs. When using DBR, the target behaviors are explicitly defined prior to the rating period, thus adults can easily monitor behavior during the observation period. A behavioral contract can utilize DBR as a tool to establish behavioral criteria and to provide feedback on student behavior. For example, a student's behavioral contract could stipulate that if the student averages ratings of 8 or above on "respectful behavior" during his free reading period, he will receive 10 extra minutes of computer time.

Who can use DBR for incentive programs?

Incentive programs can be used by anyone involved with the child:

- Teachers and other school personnel (e.g., counselor, school psychologist)
- Parents, guardians, and other family members

Using Incentive Programs

The purpose of incentive programs is to establish behavioral standards that the student should meet. When behavioral expectations are met, students receive positive feedback in the form of incentives (e.g., extra play time, candy). As previously mentioned, this incentive increases the likelihood that the student will continue to

show appropriate behavior. Incentive programs provide another way to share positive feedback with a student. Too often attention is paid to negative or problem behaviors, while the occurrence of appropriate behavior is overlooked. Incentive programs provide an opportunity for adults to acknowledge and reinforce appropriate behavior (i.e., “catch the student being good”). The use of DBR within incentive programs allows adults to track and subsequently acknowledge positive changes in behavior.

When working with students in incentive programs, it is important to keep in mind the student’s age, capabilities, and other unique factors that characterize the student. For example, students who are younger or have developmental delays may need additional instruction and training for incentive programs. Student responses to incentives also vary widely so it is important to ensure that you have selected an incentive that the student desires.

Examples of Incentive Programs

- *Point Systems/Token Economies*: When students exhibit desired behavior (as depicted by their ratings on the DBR scale) they will receive a point. When a certain number of points or tokens are collected, students can receive incentives.
- *Graphic charts*: When students exhibit desired behavior, it is indicated on a visual display (e.g., student receives stickers on a chart). When a certain number of marks are collected, students can receive incentives.

*This list is not exhaustive. Incentive programs are flexible, and there are other incentive programs available.

Categories of Incentives

- Access to tangibles (e.g., stickers, candy, toys)
- Access to desirable activity (e.g., free time, computer time)
- Access to attention (e.g., time spent with preferred adult or peer)
- Escape from undesirable acts (e.g., reduced amount of problems, alternate activity)
- Escape from undesirable social situations (e.g., getting to work one-on-one with teacher)

Steps for Implementing Incentive Programs

- 1) Know what rewards are most realistic for the situation and for the student (i.e., you may want to consider alternate awards depending on the age of the child or the child’s preferences)
- 2) Pick appropriate reward for desirable behavior (e.g., praise, additional free time, sticker, candy)
- 3) Establish rating schedule and how often student will receive feedback for behavior
- 4) Establish criteria student must meet to obtain reward
- 5) Determine reward schedules (i.e., how often student will receive incentive)
- 6) Explain behavioral contract to child by clearly outlining behavioral expectations and incentives involved for exhibiting correct behavior (can be verbal or a written document)
- 7) Rate student behavior using DBR scale
- 8) Provide feedback to student and reward student

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