section 6

**Strengthening Family Relationships
Part 2**

Reactive Strategies

Improving the behavior of your child can be challenging. Children need their parents to provide not only the directions but also the feedback that keeps them on a good behavior path.

Reactive strategies

- are evidence-based

- reinforce good behavior with positive motivation (such as rewards) and discourage bad behavior with negative motivation (such as consequences)

- work by applying consequences *after* a behavior has happened

Reinforcement (Reward) Guidelines

Programs don't just work on their own—to get the most value out of them, it's important to execute them with consistent follow-through.

Here are a few guidelines:

- **Immediacy:** Reinforce good behavior with a reward as soon as it happens

- **Frequency:** Use positive reinforcement often to encourage repetition of good behavior

- **Novelty:** Keep your child's interest high in the type of reinforcement (ie, don't do the same thing for too long)

- **Enthusiasm:** Talk to your child about the importance of good behavior

- **Description:** Make sure your child understands the connection between his or her behavior and the consequences that follow

Limitations of Rewards

Reward programs have a few limitations that are important to keep in mind:

- Behavioral changes are generally gradual rather than dramatic
- Improvement in behaviors *may* not continue or "stick" after you stop giving rewards
- Rewards do not directly weaken the bad behavior

Also, it's important to understand a reward program is not likely to be effective if the *reason* for your child's negative behavior is stronger than the reward he or she receives for performing good behavior. Also, if the chosen reward or reinforcer is not something your child will work for, it will not be effective. Sometimes it takes time to find the most effective reward, and this can change over time.

Benefits of Rewards

When executed well, reward programs may help improve behavior and benefit your child in other ways.

Reward programs can do the following:

- Sustain motivation and effort during low-interest tasks
- Highlight the cause-and-effect link between good behavior and positive outcomes (reward)
- Direct your child's attention to the outcome of a behavior
- Enhance your child's sense of competency
- Foster a positive parent–child relationship
- Build up the strength of good habits

Three Types of Reinforcement (Rewards)

There are **three common types of rewards** for reinforcing good behavior:

Edible rewards	Material rewards	Activities or privileges
such as your child's favorite treats or dinner	such as toys, CDs, video games, or clothing	such as playing a board game, wrestling time with Dad, bike ride with parents

The parent–child bond is very important to the success of your reinforcement program. **Consider reinforcing good behavior with special one-on-one play time or family activities.**

Studies show that the most powerful reward for children is time spent with you!

Token Economies

A token economy is one of the most effective reactive strategies. The focus of a token economy is to reinforce good behavior as soon as it happens. The token is a symbol of positive reinforcement that your child

- **earns** each time he or she shows good behavior, and

- **exchanges** for a more "valuable" reward when he or she collects a certain number of them

Tokens don't need to cost money. The reward comes from your child saving them up and exchanging them for something that does have value to them, such as treats, toys, or activities.

Types of Tokens

To be most effective, a token economy program should use tokens that keep your child's interest and motivation high.

Here are a few suggestions for tokens:

Stickers	Dot-to-dot charts	Magic Grid	Tangible objects, such as game chips

positive reinforcement

Ten Steps to Designing a Token Program

1 Select one specific behavior to target

- Do not say, "Clean your room"

- Instead, say, "Put your dirty clothes in the clothes basket"

2 Model the behavior for your child

3 Select the tokens (or chart) to be used

4 Select the reinforcement to be used

5 Determine how many tokens must be acquired to earn reinforcement

6 Determine the period during which the behavior will be monitored

7 Put the terms of the program in writing

8 Display the terms where you both can see them

9 Start the token program and monitor progress

10 Identify obstacles to progress and make adjustments in the program as necessary

When designing your token program, here are a few things to consider:

- Begin with a modest goal

- Target a behavior that you believe will be easy for your child to change

- Start slowly

- Give reinforcement a chance to work

- Be fair

be fair

Benefits of a Token Program

A token program can be particularly effective in helping to change a child's behavior, because the expectation for the child's behavior is very clear. In this program, children receive the incentive needed to sustain their efforts and make a lasting behavioral change. Tokens can also serve as a visual reminder of the moment when a child made a positive change in his or her behavior, and moving forward will link that behavior and the subsequent reward.

Advanced Token Programs

Advanced token programs can be used to target more than one behavior at a time or break a complex behavior into smaller, sequential steps.

For example, performing homework might be divided into 4 separate behaviors:

Recording the homework	Bringing appropriate materials home
Completing the homework	Turning the homework in to the teacher

By using an advanced token program, a child is reinforced for each step of a complex behavior to help him or her learn how to approach multistep behaviors in the future. Typically, beginning with a token program and moving on to an advanced token program to tackle more complex behaviors is recommended.

Evaluating the Success of the Program

Parents sometimes incorrectly decide that the token program is ineffective when it is actually providing benefits.

Try to keep these considerations in mind when determining the effectiveness of your program:

- Progress is often gradual rather than rapid

- Consider asking yourself the following questions:

  – Is the behavior occurring less often?

  – Is the behavior lasting for a shorter duration?

  – Is the behavior less intense or severe than before?

progress

An Alternative to a Standard Token Economy: Free-Response Cost

In a free-response cost program, the tokens are freely given to the child at the beginning of the program. A free-response program can be more effective than a traditional token economy when you are attempting to reduce the rate of high-frequency inappropriate behaviors.

Designing a Free-Response Cost Program

You can easily design a free-response cost program in a few simple steps. First, determine the inappropriate behavior and how often it occurs within a certain period. Next, choose a number of tokens to give to your child according to how often the behavior occurs and decide when and how long the behavior will be monitored. Each time the inappropriate behavior occurs, take a token away. If your child has at least one token remaining at the end of the session, he or she will receive a reward.

The loss of a token can be less frustrating because the child is not losing something that was previously earned. The tokens provide a firm, visible boundary, and the program is easy to design, develop, and implement in public settings.

reward

Free-Response Cost in Public Places

Free-response cost is particularly useful in public locations such as restaurants, malls, grocery stores, classrooms, and during car trips. Listed below are a few examples showing how free-response cost can be used in a public setting.

Example 1

John is a 7-year-old child who misbehaves at the grocery store.

- John's mother explains the rules of conduct while at the store
- John's mother provides him with 4 tokens
- John loses 1 token for each rule violation
- If John has at least one token remaining when his mother is finished shopping, he earns a milkshake

Example 2

Carol acts out whenever her parents take her for a long ride in the car.

- Carol's parents explain the rules of the road
- Carol is provided with 3 tokens for a 15-minute ride
- One token is taken away from Carol for each rule violation in the 15-minute period
- If Carol has at least one token remaining at the end of the ride, she earns 30 minutes of extra screen time

When Each Reward System Is Most Beneficial

Token Economies

Advantages

- Behavioral expectations are clearly stated

- The child receives frequent reinforcement to sustain effort

- Tokens cue appropriate behavior

- Tokens link the appropriate behavior with the outcome

- Token economies can be used for complex behaviors that must be broken down into smaller tasks

- Reduced frustration while learning a new skill with a feeling of progress and success
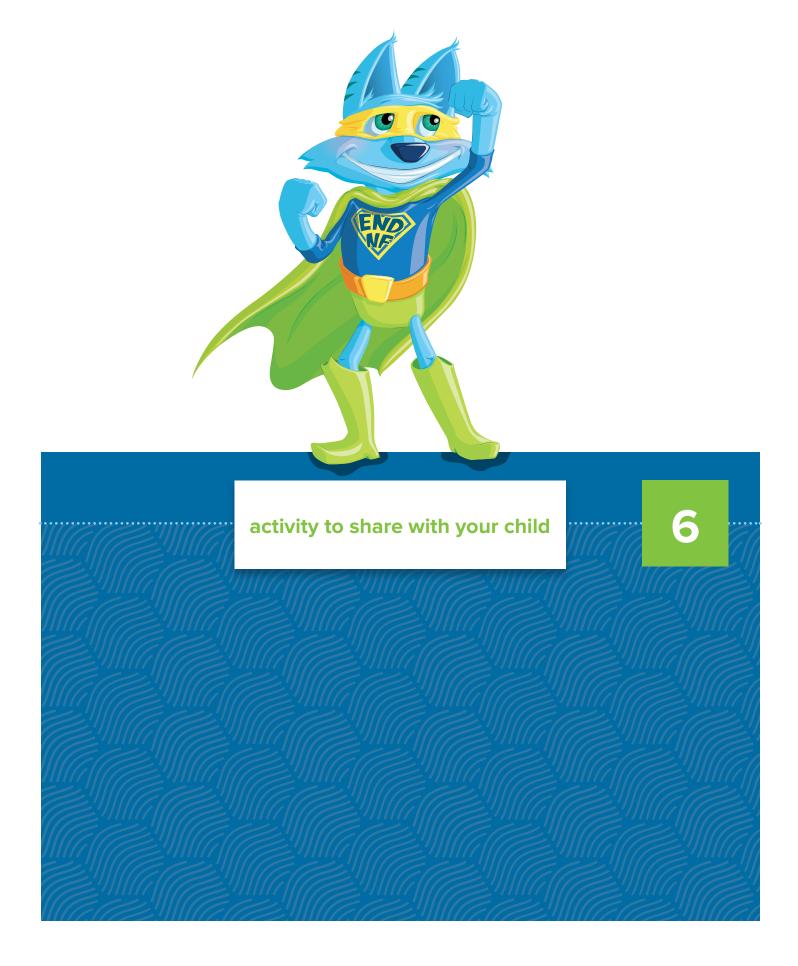
Limitations

- Require more time and effort to design and implement

- Require more care to make the program not too complex

- Require more planning, modeling and monitoring

Free-Response Cost Programs

Advantages

- Easy to design and implement

- May easily be used in public places

- Quick way to reduce high-frequency inappropriate behaviors

- Provide a specific and visible behavioral boundary

Limitations

- Do not teach or reinforce appropriate behavior

- Loss of token may frustrate some children

notes

activity to share with your child

6

favorite tokens

Sparx loves getting tokens. Help him by circling only your favorite tokens.