

Behavior Crisis Management Tool #10

Providing Students With a Level System Approach to Shape Behavior

Purpose

The purpose of this issue is to teach your students to choose positive behaviors that will lead to classroom privileges.

Examples

John has been made aware by his teacher that certain behaviors will allow him classroom privileges while negative behaviors will prevent him from having classroom options. John has been clearly informed that in order to get extra time with the computer he must be able to sit in his seat for a specified period of time during a lesson. Once this behavior is successfully accomplished for a certain period of time John will have his right to use the computer during free periods of the day. However, John will also learn that negative behaviors will cause him to be denied such fun activities. It is hoped that John will learn to shape his behavior so that he receives positive rewards.

Mary is in a classroom where everyone starts out with privileges and can only lose them by acting inappropriately according to the teacher's standards. As long as Mary maintains positive classroom behavior she will enjoy privileges.

What May Not Work

When it comes to shaping behavior, teachers who wait until the behavior has occurred to develop rules are not helping the student determine or shape the outcome of their own behavior. A classroom where rules are not clear, or not posted, or where rewards and consequences are not clear creates a difficult environment for students who have a difficult time monitoring their own behavior. Hoping for internal controls on the parts of some children can be a costly mistake, While not all children may need external boundaries of rewards and consequences, it is not a bad idea to begin this process from the beginning of the school year since society works in the same manner. In society following laws and rules provides positive outcomes while negative behavior choices can lead to serious social and legal difficulties.

Try This

With this system you have two possible choices. The first choice is called the Privileges for All Concept. With this concept all students start off the year with classroom privileges and are told they have them until they give you a reason to take it away. However, the reasons to lose privileges have to be posted i.e. running in the halls. In this way everyone has a vested interest in maintaining positive behavior.

The second option is called the Point and Level System. With this concept of shaping behavior all students begin at Level I and have the option of moving to Level II and then Level III. All levels are defined with both privileges and behaviors that must be maintained in order to stay at that level and behaviors that need to be accomplished to move to the next level. All behaviors have a point value and the teacher sets point goals to move to the next level. The behaviors listed can be designed to fit your class and the needs of the children.

According to Special Connections (2009) point and level systems are a behavioral management approach that have been commonly recommended by educators, used in programs for students that exhibit challenging behavior, and discussed in the literature. They are designed to be an organizational framework for managing student behavior where “students access greater independences and more privileges as they demonstrate increased behavioral control” (Heward, p. 306, 2003). Students learn appropriate behavior through clearly defined behavioral expectations and rewards, privileges, and consequences linked to those expectations. There are specific criteria for advancement to the next level where the student(s) enjoy more desirable contingencies. It is intended that students who proceed through the levels are more able to self-manage, capable of handling more responsibility and therefore enjoy greater independence. There are four main goals of point and level systems: 1) increasing appropriate behavior; 2) promoting academic achievement; 3) fostering a student’s improvement through self-management; and 4) developing personal responsibility for social emotional and academic performance (Farrell, Smith & Brownell, 1998).

There are many different examples of point and level systems that have been used to manage challenging student behavior in a variety of settings (Algozzine, 1990; Barbetta, 1990a, 1990b; Bauer & Shea, 1988; Bauer, Shea, & Keppler, 1986; Cruz & Cullinan, 2001; Kerr & Nelson, 1989). The example given here is one type of point and level system developed and used by the authors for over ten years in an elementary program for students with behavioral challenges in a public school setting. The system has been used and adapted in several other school districts at all grade levels with reported effectiveness.

This system is described in detail to provide one example of how point and level systems might be used and combined with other strategies (e.g. token economies, positive reinforcement, self-management). However, we recommend that teachers considering the use of a point and level system look at many examples and design a system that meets the needs of their specific group of students.

Click here to view an example of a point level system.

http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/~specconn/page/behavior/classroom/pdf/tool2_example.pdf

What are the advantages and disadvantages of point and level systems?

The primary advantage of level systems is that it specifies a hierarchy of skills that are needed to be successful in the educational setting. Teachers generally have found point and level systems to be effective in increasing appropriate behavior and academic achievement. Our experience supports the conclusion that point and level systems can be effective. However, there is little empirical evidence that the use of these systems result in the generalization and maintenance of behavior changes independent of extrinsic teacher control. In addition, concern has been raised that level systems may violate the basic principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) when implemented in a uniform, standardized fashion for all students in a give classroom or school. Although we do recommend the use of point and level systems as one tool of effective behavioral management, teachers should be careful to design the system to accommodate the specific goals of each student or each group of students with regards to initial level placement, use of rewards and consequences, and criteria for progressing through the system.

References/Recommended Resources

Algozzine, R. (1990). Problem behavior management: Educator's resource service. Rockville, MD: Aspen.

Barbetta, P. (1990a) GOALS: A group-oriented adapted levels systems for children with behavior disorders. *Academic Thearpy*, 25, 645-656.

Bauer, A.M. & Shea, T.M. (1988). Structuring classrooms through level systems. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 21(3), 1-12.

Bauer, A.M., Shea, T.M., & Keppler, R. (1986). Level systems: A framework for the individualization of behavior management. *Behavioral Disorders*, 12, 28-35.

Cruz, L. & Cullinan, D. (2001). Awarding points, using levels to help children improve behavior. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(3), 16-23.

Farrell, D.T., Smith, S.W., & Brownell, M.T. (1998). Teacher perceptions of level system effectiveness on the behavior of students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *The Journal of Special Education*, 32(2), 89-98.

Heward, W.L. (2003). *Exceptional children: An introduction to special education*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Kerr, M. & Nelson, C. M. (1989). *Strategies for managing behavior problems in the classroom* (2nd ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Additional Recommended Resources (Point and Level Systems)

Farrell, D.T., & Smith, S.W. (1993). Level system use in special education: Classroom intervention with prima facie appeal. *Behavioral Disorders*, 18(4), 251-264.