

National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET)

THE PRACTICAL TEACHER

This Month's Topic:

Creating Reward Menus That Motivate

Tips for Teachers

Rewards are often central to effective school interventions. As possible incentives that students can earn for appropriate school performance or conduct, these reinforcers (or 'rewards') often serve as the motivational 'engine' that drives successful interventions. Reward systems are usually most powerful when a student can select from a range of reward choices ('reward menu'). Offering students a menu of possible rewards is effective because it both gives students a meaningful choice of reinforcers and reduces the likelihood that the child will eventually tire of any specific reward.

However, some children (e.g., those with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) may lose interest in specific reward choices more quickly than do their typical peers. Teachers will want to regularly update and refresh reward menus for such children to ensure these reinforcers retain their power to positively shape those students' behaviors.

Creating a 'Reward Deck.' A Reward Deck is an idea that can help teachers to quickly select and regularly update student reward menus. This strategy involves 5 steps:

1.) The teacher reviews a list of reward choices typically available in school settings. From this larger list, the teacher selects only those rewards that she or he approves of using, believes would be acceptable to other members of the school community (e.g., administration, parents), and finds feasible and affordable. These include:

Academic Activities

- Go to the library to select a book
- Help a classmate with an academic assignment
- Help the teacher to present a lesson (e.g., by completing sample math problem on blackboard, reading a section of text aloud, assisting cooperative learning groups on an activity)
- Invite an adult "reading buddy" of student's choice to classroom to read with student
- Listen to books-on-tape
- Play academic computer games
- Read a book of his/her choice
- Read a story aloud to younger children

- Read aloud to the class
- Select a class learning activity from a list of choices
- Select a friend as a "study buddy" on an in-class work assignment
- Select friends to sit with to complete a cooperative learning activity
- Spend time (with appropriate supervision) on the Internet at academic sites

Helping Roles

- 'Adopt' a younger student and earn (through good behavior) daily visits to check in with that student as an older mentor
- Be appointed timekeeper for an activity: announce a 5-minute warning near end of activity and announce when activity is over
- Be given responsibility for assigning other students in the class to helping roles, chores, or tasks
- Complete chores or helpful activities around the classroom
- Deliver school-wide announcements
- Help the custodian
- Help the library media specialist
- Help a specials teacher (e.g., art, music, gym)
- Take a note to the main office
- Work at the school store

Praise/Recognition

- Be awarded a trophy, medal, or other honor for good behavior/caring attitude
- Be praised on school-wide announcements for good behavior or caring attitude
- Be praised privately by the teacher or other adult
- Design--or post work on--a class or hall bulletin board
- Get a silent "thumbs up" or other sign from teacher indicating praise and approval
- Have the teacher call the student's parent/guardian to give positive feedback about the student
- Have the teacher write a positive note to the student's parent/guardian
- Post drawings or other artwork in a public place
- Post writings in a public place
- Receive a "good job" note from the teacher

Prizes/Privileges/Rewards

- Allow student to call parent(s)
- Be allowed to sit, stand, or lie down anywhere in the classroom (short of distracting other children) during story time or independent seat work
- Be dismissed from school 2 minutes early
- Be given a 'raffle ticket' that the student writes name on and throws into a fishbowl for prize drawings
- Be permitted to sit in a reserved section of the lunchroom
- Be sent to recess 2 minutes earlier than the rest of the class
- Draw a prize from the class 'prize box'
- Earn behavior-points or -tokens to be redeemed for prizes or privileges
- Have first choice in selecting work materials (e.g., scissors, crayons, paper) and/or seating assignments
- Have lunch in the classroom with the teacher
- IOU redeemable for credit on one wrong item on a future in-class quiz or homework assignment
- Receive a coupon to be redeemed at a later time for a preferred activity

- Receive a sticker
- Receive candy, gum, or other edible treats
- Receive pass to "Get out of one homework assignment of your choice"
- Select a class fun activity from a list of choices
- Select the pizza toppings for a class pizza party
- Sit near the teacher
- Take the lead position in line
- Tell a joke or riddle to the class

Recreation

- Be selected by the teacher to accompany another student to a fun activity
- Get extra gym time with another class
- Get extra recess time with another class
- Listen to music
- Play a game with a friend
- Play non-academic computer games
- Select fun activity from "Activity Shelf" (stocked with play materials, games)
- Spend time (with appropriate supervision) on the Internet at recreational sites
- Watch part or all of a video (preselected by the teacher and cleared with the student's parent)
- Work on a jigsaw or other puzzle
- Write or draw on blackboard/whiteboard/easel paper

2.) The teacher writes out acceptable reward choices on index cards-- to create a master 'Reward Deck'

3.) Whenever the teacher wants to create a reward menu for a particular student, he or she first 'screens' reward choices that appear in the master Reward Deck and temporarily removes any that seem inappropriate for that specific case. (For example, the teacher may screen out the reward 'pizza party' because it is too expensive to offer to a student who has only minor difficulties with homework completion.)

4.) The teacher then sits with the child and presents each of the reward choices remaining in the Reward Deck. For each reward option, the child indicates whether he or she (a) likes the reward a lot, (b) likes the reward a little, or (c) doesn't care for the reward. The teacher sorts the reward options into three piles that match these rating categories. The teacher can then assemble that child's Reward Menu using the student's top choices ("like a lot"). If the instructor needs additional choices to fill out the rest of the menu, he or she can pull items from the student's "like a little" category as well.

5.) (Optional but recommended) Periodically, the instructor can meet with the student and repeat the above procedure to 'refresh' the Reward Menu quickly and easily.

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