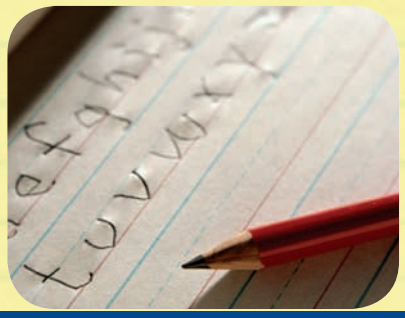
PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Teaching Students with Learning Problems
C. Mercer A Mercer P. Pullen
Eighth Edition



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hurting the student's feelings (e.g., "You're almost right," "Let's do it together," and "Nice try").
- Help the student compile a personal scrapbook. Include pictures or drawings of family, friends, and pets. If possible, take photographs in class. The scrapbook can include written accounts of trips, interests, and favorite activities.
- Set realistic goals with the student on selected tasks. Record the student's daily progress toward the goal. When the goal is achieved, point out the progress to make the student feel proud of the accomplishments.
- Emphasize the importance of student effort on academic tasks and teach the student to attribute successes and failures to amount of effort. This may result in increased persistence on difficult material and reduce doubts of intellectual ability.

INSTRUCTIONAL GAMES IN EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Activities to promote emotional development can be presented in a game format. Because games often stimulate interest and motivation, they frequently engage students with emotional difficulties. The following game promotes emotional development.

Personality Game

Materials: Start-to-finish game board; cards with personality traits written on them; markers.

Directions: The cards are placed face down on the playing board (see Figure 5.3). The first player takes the top card and reads it aloud. If the player thinks the card describes him or her, the player's marker is moved forward five spaces. However, if the player believes the statement on the card does not apply, but the majority of the group thinks it does (or vice versa), the player's marker is moved back three spaces. If neither the player nor the others believes the card applies, the player's marker is not moved. The players may tell why they think a trait is or is not descriptive of their personality. After each turn the card is placed face down in the discard pile. If a blank card is picked, the player must make up a trait. Players may choose the top card from either the original card pile or the discard pile. The purpose of the game is to help students better understand themselves. The first player to reach the finish space is the winner.

Sample cards: I am impatient; I joke around a lot; I am kind to animals; I don't ever like school.

COMMERCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Various programs and materials are available to help students deal with emotional problems. The following programs can help students understand themselves better and develop appropriate strategies for dealing with personal problems.

The Passport Program

The Passport Program: A Journey Through Emotional, Social, Cognitive, and Self-Development, developed by A. Vernon (published by Research Press), is designed to help students

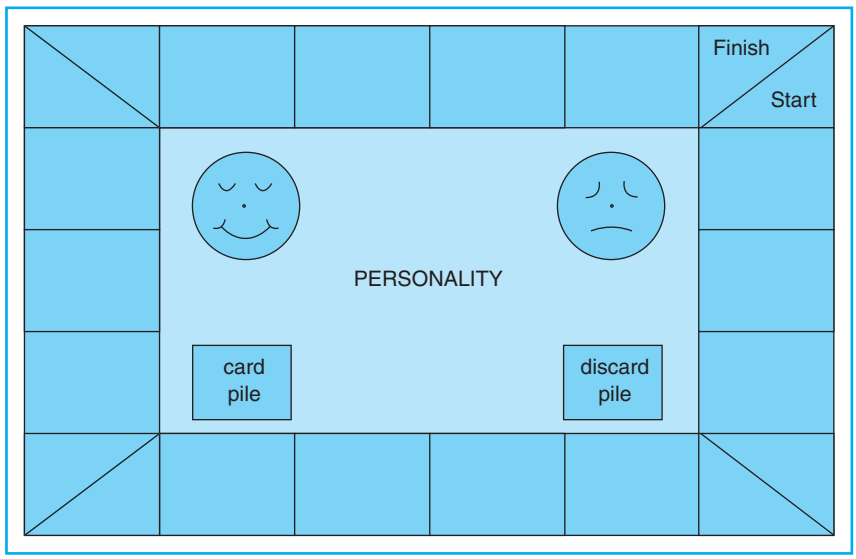


FIGURE 5.3
Personality game board

learn positive mental health concepts by developing self-acceptance, personal relationship skills, and problem-solving and decision-making strategies. Each of the three volumes (i.e., grades 1–5, grades 6–8, and grades 9–12) includes learning activities that cover emotional development, social development, cognitive development, and self-development. The activities are designed for use in the classroom or in small-group settings and include games, stories, role plays, reading and writing activities, and discussion questions. The program is grounded in developmental theory and the principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy.

Thinking, Feeling, Behaving

Thinking, Feeling, Behaving, developed by A. Vernon (published by Research Press), is an emotional education curriculum based on the principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. The curriculum consists of one volume for youngsters in first through sixth grade and one volume for adolescents in seventh through twelfth grade. Each volume includes 90 field-tested activities arranged by grade level and organized into the categories of self-acceptance, feelings, beliefs and behavior, problem solving/decision making, and interpersonal relationships. The activities are designed for use in small-group settings and include simulation games, stories, role plays, written activities, brainstorming, and art activities. The curriculum is appropriate as a preventive or remedial program to help students learn to use positive health concepts in overcoming irrational beliefs, negative feelings and attitudes, and the negative consequences that may result.

BEHAVIORAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

Discipline and fighting rank among the top problems facing public schools (Rose & Gallup, 2006). Whelan (1996) maintains that broken social bonds, inordinate amounts of stress and conflict, the observation of violent behavior in relationships, and substance abuse are primary reasons that youngsters face conflicts in school and are disruptive. Although many of the causes of disruptive behavior are beyond the parameters of the educational system, these conditions do not lessen the educator's responsibility to ameliorate discipline problems. Whelan maintains that one of the primary reasons that discipline problems remain a top concern is many educators fail to use effective and efficient classroom management procedures.

If the techniques featured in this chapter in the sections on interventions (i.e., general techniques for promoting social, emotional, and behavioral development; social development interventions; and emotional development interventions) are applied, disruptive behavior should diminish to the extent that it is not a problem. In essence, when applied within a classroom community that values cooperation, feelings, and property, using the techniques listed in this chapter should diminish or eliminate chronic disruptive behavior. The primary techniques include academic success through good teaching, the use of motivation techniques, the occasional use of mild consequences, social skills instruction, self-regulation instruction, and sensitivity to personality variables. If these techniques are unsuccessful, more intense management techniques should be used. Kame'enui et al. (1995) note that three levels of intervention are needed for managing mild to severe behavioral problems. The first level of intervention is for mild behavioral problems, and 80 percent of students respond to routine instructional management at this level. At the

Students can be rewarded for appropriate behavior in creative ways. EyeWire Collection/Getty Images–Photodisc/Royalty Free

second level of intervention, another 15 percent of students present persistent problems and require ongoing attention and a strategic intervention plan. The third level of intervention is for the remaining 5 percent of students who exhibit severe and chronic behavioral problems.

A management approach grounded in teaching students appropriate behavior, responsibility, and self-regulation will succeed with almost all students. This section includes reinforcement and punishment perspectives and procedures that help with students requiring strategic management plans and vigilance.

Positive Reinforcement Plan

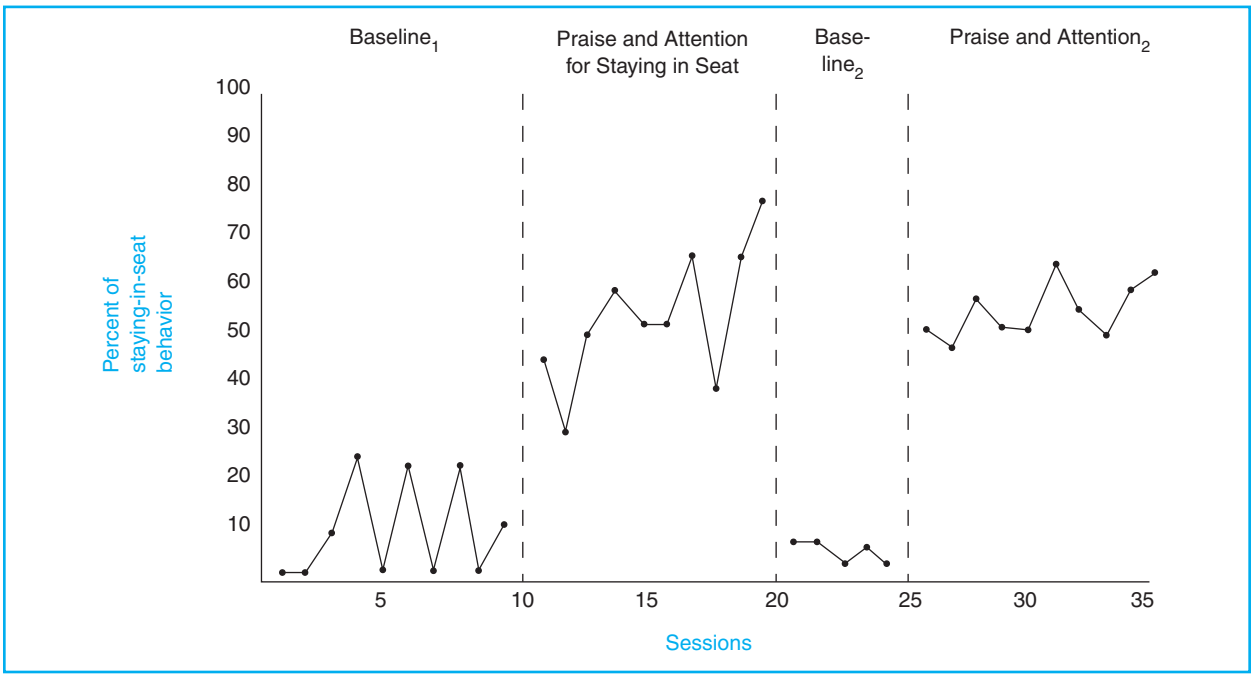
Knowledge and application of reinforcement principles can help manage a classroom. Many teachers apply these principles in a natural way, without taking the time to write a behavior modification plan specifying the target behavior, consequent events, schedule of reinforcement, and so forth. However, some students' behavior does not change unless a highly systematic behavior modification plan is developed and applied.

Figure 5.4 presents a record of a behavior modification plan to increase staying-in-seat behavior. The teacher used a time-sampling technique to record whether the student stayed seated during seatwork activities. Observation sessions were 30 minutes long, and the teacher used a recording sheet marked off with a row of ten squares. The teacher looked at the student every 3 minutes and recorded a "+" if the student was seated and a "–" if the student was not. As Figure 5.4 shows, the student's percentage of staying-in-seat behavior was low during baseline$_1$. However, when the teacher began giving the student praise and attention for appropriate in-seat behavior (in sessions 11 through 20), the level of the desired behavior increased greatly. When praise and attention were withdrawn in baseline$_2$ (sessions 21 through 25), the student's staying-in-seat behavior sharply diminished. However, when praise and attention were provided again (in sessions 26 through 35), the level of the appropriate behavior quickly increased. Thus, the teacher was able to note the effects of teacher attention on modifying the student's out-of-seat behavior.

Contingency Contracting

Contracts between a student and the classroom teacher can help to motivate the student toward desirable behavior changes. A *contract* is an agreement—verbal or written—between two parties. The term *contingent* means that there is a relationship between what one does and the consequences. In behavior modification,

FIGURE 5.4
Record of a behavior modification plan to increase staying-in-seat behavior



contingency contracting is based on the Premack Principle (Premack, 1959), which states that the frequency of a less preferred activity increases when it is followed by the opportunity to engage in one that is preferred. For example, if the student would rather play outside than sit quietly in the classroom, the contingency contract might state that sitting quietly for a certain amount of time will be followed by outside play.

The following steps are involved in writing a contingency contract.

1. The teacher outlines the specific behavior required of the student.
2. The teacher identifies the reinforcement for which the student will work. This reinforcement should be available to the student *only* for performing the specified behavior. The required behavior or the consequent reinforcement can be determined through student–teacher discussions.
3. The teacher specifies the terms of the contract, which should include the amount or type of behavior required and the amount or type of reward.
4. The teacher watches for the specified behavior to occur and then rewards the student according to the terms of the contract.

A sample contingency contract is presented in Figure 5.5.

A contingency contract should represent an agreement between the student and the teacher. The terms should be stated clearly in a positive manner and should be fair for both the student and the teacher. After both parties have signed the contract, the conditions should be monitored frequently to assess progress. In addition, all parts of the contract should be followed systematically, and the student should receive reinforcement as soon as the contract is completed.

Various types of contracts can be used. The agreement may or may not specify a time limit within which the required behavior must be performed. Intermittent reinforcers can be used in long-term contracts, and steps toward the desired behavior can be rewarded. Contracts also can include agreements between the student and other school personnel or parents. Group contracts can be used in which the entire class agrees to behave in a certain manner or perform a specified task by a designated date, and the teacher agrees to reward students who fulfill the agreement. Contingency contracting thus can promote desirable social or academic actions by involving students in managing their own behavior.

Token Systems

Token reinforcement systems are used widely in behavior modification and have been validated empirically for increasing desired behaviors of students with disabilities (Alter, Wyrick, Brown, & Lingo, 2008). These systems have three basic characteristics: (1) Behaviors to be reinforced are stated clearly, (2) procedures are devised for giving out a reinforcing stimulus (i.e., token) when the target behavior occurs, and (3) a set of rules is explained to govern the exchange of tokens for reinforcing objects or events.

FIGURE 5.5
A sample contingency contract

CONTRACT

Beginning date: 10/21

Ending date: 10/25

STUDENT: I agree to finish my math seatwork during math period on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Signed Timmy

TEACHER: I agree to give Timmy free time during math period on Friday.

Signed Mrs. Jackson

A *token* is an item given to a student immediately after a target behavior occurs. Usually the tokens have little intrinsic value, but they acquire value when they can be exchanged for a desired object or activity. Tokens can consist of play money, trading stamps, poker chips, stars, or any other object that is easy to dispense and store. These tokens can be accumulated and then exchanged for a desired object or activity. A classroom store can be established where, at designated times, each student may purchase reinforcers by trading in earned tokens. Objects (e.g., balloons, comics, jewelry, sports trading cards, pennies, coloring books, and magazines) and activities (e.g., playing a game, listening to records, coloring, and watching a filmstrip) can be available in the store. A reward menu can be posted, listing the store items and their costs (e.g., listening to records for 10 minutes = 10 tokens; purchasing a baseball trading card = 15 tokens).

Token systems have several advantages. First, they avoid boredom because tokens can be traded for a variety of reinforcing objects or events. Second, a token system is useful with students who generally do not respond to social reinforcement. Third, tokens are administered easily, and the number can be adjusted to reflect the time and energy required to perform the target behavior. Fourth, token systems help students appreciate the relationship between desirable behavior and reinforcement. Students learn that behavior has consequences, which is likely to enhance self-control.

Blackham and Silberman (1980) stress that a token system must be developed and applied thoughtfully. They also report that problems should be expected at first, and the teacher will have to refine the system. Blackham and Silberman suggest guidelines for planning and using a token system.

- The target behaviors that earn tokens should be specified clearly. For example, individual behaviors can be posted on a student's desk. Rules governing group behavior contingencies should be reviewed frequently.
- The reinforcers that the tokens are exchanged for must be appealing and available *only* within the token system.
- The number of tokens earned must match the effort required for performing the target behavior. If a student has great difficulty staying on task during math seatwork, the reward for staying on task must be sufficient to encourage on-task behavior.
- If possible, the teacher should keep a record of the number of tokens each student and the group earn. This type of record often provides an additional incentive to students.
- If *response cost* (i.e., token fines) is used, the conditions under which tokens are earned and lost must be specified clearly. Awarding and taking away tokens always must be related to student *behavior.* Arguments about token loss should be avoided.
- A scheduled token exchange at the end of the day usually works best.
- The system should be devised so that there is self-competition rather than competition with others.
- A well-planned token system gradually should withdraw material reinforcers and stress reinforcing activities and events. Also, praise should be combined with the tokens so that social reinforcement eventually can be used alone to maintain desirable behaviors.
- The token system should be simple, functional, and not distracting to the learning process. In school, check-mark tokens are often the easiest to use. Each student is given a card, and the teacher puts checks on it as they are earned. A special pen can be used to distinguish these checks. Other students cannot use a student's card, whereas tangible tokens might be traded or stolen.

Extrinsic Reinforcement

Many disruptive or aggressive students need extrinsic reinforcers to establish the habits of appropriate behavior. Once these habits are developed in caring environments, effort should be made to help them become intrinsically motivated. Table 5.7 provides some advantages and disadvantages of several extrinsic reinforcers.

Sprick (2001) provides the following guidelines for changing a behavior during spontaneous interventions.

- Reinforce students who are doing the behavior in an appropriate manner.
- When a misbehaving student begins to behave, reinforce the student.
- Provide fun activities for the whole class.
- Provide fun activities for a student who improves in behavior or academic performance.

Sprick recommends the following modifications when the behavior improves.

- Require more of the desired behavior for the same amount of reinforcement.
- When the behavior has reached the appropriate level of success, reinforce less frequently and less immediately.

Go to the Assignments and Activities section of the Topic Promoting Social and Emotional Development in the MyEducationLab for your course and complete the activity entitled Conflict Resolution by Students.

TABLE 5.7
Advantages and disadvantages of extrinsic reinforcers

Type and Definition of Reinforcer	Advantages	Disadvantages
Tangible—a physical object given for appropriate behavior Examples: popcorn, crackers, stickers, pencils, books, coupons, and mazes	Are very desirable Are highly reinforcing	Must be purchased May teach incorrect associations Should be paired with praise Are temporary and should be switched to social praise as soon as possible
Token—an item, given for appropriate behavior, that can be exchanged at a later time for rewards (e.g., toys, food, or games), which may be displayed in a classroom store Examples: points, poker chips, stars, trading stamps, and play money	Are a concrete means for immediate reinforcement Provide a record of accomplishments Do not interfere with class routines	Require much organization Require planning, time, and energy to use Require an assortment of backup items May not generalize Create dependency on concrete reinforcement
Social—a social behavior provided contingent on appropriate behavior Examples: gestures (e.g., smile, wink, thumbs up, and eye contact), verbal approval (e.g., praise and encouragement), and touch (e.g., hug, shoulder pat, handshake, and high-five)	Easy to use Require little teacher effort Are always available Rarely cause criticism Are powerful reinforcers	Are sometimes not powerful enough
Activity—an action that students get to do as a reward for appropriate behavior Examples: eat lunch with teacher, run errands, have free time, lead the line, pass out books, and use the computer	Are readily available Can be combined with social reinforcers Can be built into class routines	May delay gratification May interrupt other activities

- When delayed reinforcement has successfully maintained the desired behavior, begin to modify the reinforcement by using a less powerful reinforcer or one closer to intrinsic reinforcement.
- When the behavior has been maintained successfully with a less powerful reinforcer, switch from a continuous reinforcer to an intermittent reinforcer.

Punishment

Unfortunately, some people tend to equate discipline with punishment. An effective classroom management plan, however, focuses on prevention or proactive strategies and minimizes the use of punishment. Sprick (2001) and Whelan (1996) maintain that an emphasis on punishment is inappropriate for the following reasons.

- Punishment focuses on decreasing an inappropriate behavior rather than on teaching an appropriate behavior.
- Punishment can be self-defeating and result in such complications as poor self-image or revenge.
- Students may become anxious and learn to lie, cheat, or steal to avoid punishment. Also, anxiety interferes with learning.
- Punishment is effective only while the threat is present, and it does not eliminate the desire to engage in misbehavior.

Overall, effective classroom management does not stress punishing the misbehavior but emphasizes its correction. When misbehavior occurs, the teacher works with the student to solve it.

Although punishment is not a preferred approach, it is needed periodically as a transition strategy for students who frequently engage in misbehavior. Kame'enui et al. (1995) note that punishment serves as a transition strategy to restore a safe and productive learning environment. Some of the advantages of punishment highlight its usefulness as a transition strategy. For example, punishment can be powerful if used effectively, and, although the behavior change may be temporary, punishment can reduce disruptive behavior rapidly. Also, punishment can provide information to