

THE GOOD BEHAVIOR GAME: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

The Good Behavior Game (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969) is an *interdependent group contingency* technique in which consequences of behavior are administered to a group of students as a function of the group's performance as a whole. The group can be the entire class or a subgroup of students within the class. In the Good Behavior Game, reinforcers are contingent upon the behavior of subgroups, or teams, of students who are selected by the teacher. In a game-like atmosphere, each team of students earns points, which are recorded on the board or chart, and later exchanged for tangible or activity reinforcers. The rewarding of points is contingent upon the behavior of each team. Teams "compete" against each other, although all teams can "win" by earning a predetermined number of points for following the rules of the "game." The rules are set by the teacher and focus on those behaviors that the teacher desires to change (e.g., students will raise their hand before talking, students will respect the property of others). How, and how many, points are earned varies with different versions of the game, as well as the preferences of the individual teacher.

How to Implement the Good Behavior Game:

1. Divide the class into two or more teams, depending on class size. Let the students name their teams. To the degree possible, comprise the teams so that they are reasonably balanced in terms of the members' behavioral and academic characteristics. (When the game is being played, if one student continues to cost a team points, consider making that student a separate "team.")
2. Remind the class of, and discuss, the importance of classroom rules and review the rules that apply during the Good Behavior Game (e.g., respect the viewpoints of others, do not talk while others are speaking).
3. Decide on a reasonable and fair class reinforcer for good behavior. Solicit recommendations from students following the guidelines presented above. Commonly-reported reinforcers are extra recess, a popcorn party, free time, and homework passes. You might want to offer a bonus for exceptionally good behavior. Decide on the time of day (or the day of the week) that an earned reinforcer will be provided.
4. Divide the class period into a set number of intervals, such as 5- or 10-minute intervals. The interval length should depend on the severity of the behavior problems: Use shorter intervals for more frequent behavior problems (note: you can always change the interval length).
5. Decide on the number of intervals, out of the total for the period, that the students must behave in order to earn the predetermined reinforcer. For example, a team must behave during at least 70% or 14 of the 20-five-minute intervals, in order to receive the reinforcer. If a bonus is possible, establish the criterion (e.g., if you receive at least 14 points, you get a popcorn party. If you receive 20 points, you also get extra recess.) Be sure the criterion for reinforcement is reasonable for the skill level of your students. It is important to remember that you can make the criterion "loftier" as students' behavior improves.

7. At the end of each interval in which a team exhibits the targeted appropriate behaviors, record the points earned on the board or a chart so that the entire class sees them. Total the points across intervals at the end of each period. Compute each team's standing at the end of each day (and week if the game is played for the week) until the game ends.
7. Encourage student involvement in as many "administrative" activities of the game as possible, such as defining and setting the overall goals of the game, specifying the rules of the game, monitoring and recording the target behaviors, and awarding and totaling points. This step can increase student interest in and ownership of the game and also transfer some of the management from you to them.
9. Explain the "team rules" to the class, while emphasizing that *all* teams can win and that everyone on a team must behave in order for a team to win. Thus, emphasize cooperation, not competition.

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Additional Resources:

Barrish, H. H., Saunders, M., & Wolf, M. M. (1969). Good behavior game: Effects of individual contingencies for group consequences on disruptive behavior in a classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 2, 1969, 119-124.

Embry, D. (2002). The Good Behavior Game: A best practice candidate as a universal behavioral vaccine. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review*, 5(4), 273-297.

<http://www.bpp.jhu.edu/publish/Manuals/gbg/html>: Good Behavior Game Manual

<http://www.interventioncentral.org/htmldocs/interventions/gbg/shtml>: Good Behavior Game

<http://www.marylandblueprints.org/blueprints/programs/Good%20Behavior%20Game.pdf>: Good Behavior Game Manual.