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## Token Economy

### Teaching Your Child The Value Of Work

Children are in a constant stage of learning. Many of the greatest lessons are those taught outside the classroom, in real world experiences. Good work ethics and task completion is one of those skills which requires teaching and practice outside the classroom to prepare a child for school, jobs, post-secondary education and a career.

A mother recently asked how to get her children to make their beds each morning, as she was constantly nagging at them to complete this task. When discussed further, she explained that she would often repeatedly ask them to make their beds, and they would eventually complete the task. As she discussed their future, concerns about their independence began to plague her.

#### The solution:

Research strongly supports the benefits of reinforcement as a part of fostering new skills and building independence (Office of Integrated Services for Children, 2003 ). In order to effectively motivate a child to begin taking ownership, they need a reason to do so. For some children, the praise from a parent or from task completion serves as its own reward. However, for other children, it is essential to embed strategies to effectively reinforce skill development.

A token economy is the use of a valueless “token”, such as a sticker or monopoly money, in order to reinforce a task. The child learns that the accumulation of tokens results in the receipt of a prize, or reinforcement.

#### The implementation:

It is important to note that in order for a token economy to be effective, it must be of value to the child. If the prize at the end of their efforts is “not worth it”, the token economy will not be effective in the future. It is important to thereby conduct a reinforcement-preference assessment (Fisher et al., 1992), or essentially include your child on the decision of the prize. Prizes can vary from a treat at the dollar store, choosing their favourite food for dinner or receiving more TV or videogame time. The prize is dependent on what will motivate your individual child. See reverse for reinforcement ideas.

Begin by discussing with your child the behaviours or tasks that will be rewarded with tokens. Start small and gradually increase the number of tasks. For a younger child one or two tasks are appropriate, older children can likely manage more tasks.

Select your tokens, and begin small. Have your child begin by working for half the number of tokens for their age (example, a six-year-old would work for 3 tokens). Ensure they can earn enough tokens to gain their reinforcers within 1 to 2 days. If they have to wait too long, the token economy may lose value.

Once your child has earned their prize two or three times, start to increase the number of tokens needed in order to gain the prize. As you thin the reinforcement, ensure you explain to your child that you are increasing your expectations because they are such great learners (Kodak et al., 2007). The increase needs to be seen as an accomplishment, otherwise there will be a loss of interest.

#### The Teaching:

The advantage of using a token economy is the multitude of teaching opportunities that accompany its use. You can teach:

- Money concepts
- Spelling (write a list of reinforcers each time)
- Model real-world examples (invest half at the bank)
- Delayed gratification (choosing between items worth more or less tokens)
- Addition & subtraction
- Waiting
- Responsibility
- Cause-effect relations Problem solving

### Reinforcement Ideas:

- Choose the video for movie night
- Breakfast in bed
- A treat (ice cream, popcorn, etc.)
- More computer time
- Attend a party or special event
- A trip to the public swim
- Stay up late
- Extra dessert
- Extra time outside/playing with friends
- A sleepover
- A “no-chores” day
- A foot rub
- Plan family games night
- Organize a family tournament (chess, sports, etc.)

### Next Steps:

We encourage you to attend one of our eXL Parent Workshops to learn more about helping your child learn, grow and prepare for the future.

### References:

Fisher, W., Piazza, C.C, Bowman, L.G, Hagopian, L.P., Owens, J.C. & Slevin, I. (1992). A comparison of two approaches for identifying reinforcers for persons with severe and profound disabilities. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis*, 25, 491-498.

*Intensive Behavioural Intervention: A Manual for Instructor Therapists*. Office of Integrated Services for Children, Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. 2003.

Kodak, T., Lerman, D.C. & Call, N. (2007). Evaluating the influence of post-session reinforcement on choice of reinforcement. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis*, 40, 515-527.