Setting up a Token System  
Packet adapted from CBT+ Home Economy Token Guide

[http://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/TF-%20CBT/pages/positive\_parenting.html#](http://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/TF-%20CBT/pages/positive_parenting.html)

**Goal:** To increase your child’s motivation to meet expectations and their independence in

monitoring their behavior.

Choose Behaviors to Reward

**CLEAR & OBSERVABLE**. Define the behavior, when it is expected, and how many warnings given. E.g., “Follow directions with 1 or less reminders.”

**SCHEDULED.** Pick behaviors that occur as part of a routine or in order to start, like morning or after school (getting dressed, brushing teeth). Think about when you will monitor the target behaviors.

**START SMALL.** Pick only 1-3 behaviors to target first. Start with easy behaviors first so your child can see success.

Giving Tokens

**TANGIBLE.** Give a “token” that can be seen and held, like a marble, ticket, or poker chip.

**AFTER BEHAVIOR.** The reinforcement must occur after the behavior occurs, not “on promise.” IMMEDIATE. The reward must be given immediately after the behavior occurs (i.e. present a

token or write in a point on the spot, not at the end of the day)

**CONSISTENT.** Tokens must be given every time in the beginning. Eventually, once your child is meeting expectations often, it can be faded out.

**INDEPENDENT OF OTHER BEHAVIORS.** Rewards earned through the token system should not be taken away, regardless of other behavior, in the first few weeks of the system.

Choosing Rewards

**VARIETY.** Provide your child with choices of rewards to keep their interest; change the choices

often and include your child in choosing rewards.

**NATURAL REWARDS.** Rewards that fit in naturally with the behavior or your daily routine (i.e. TV time when homework is completed on time) are better than options that take extra time and effort to provide (i.e. an outing, toy).

**BIG AND SMALL.** It can be helpful to have small rewards that can be earned daily to keep children’s interest, but also larger, more exciting rewards that hold interest over time.

**NOVEL/EXCITING.** Rewards should be things that your child will not get otherwise. If they get to have a friend over regardless of whether or not they earn it, this would not be a good option

Detailed Checklist for Setting up a Token System

1. **Key Concepts**
   1. One purpose of the token economy is to make it clear to the child what they are supposed to do. Having written expectations (e.g., posted on a chart) serve this purpose.
   2. A second purpose is to state clearly to the child what rewards the child will earn for following the expectations. Because children with do best with immediate consequences, it is important to immediately use tokens as the rewards for the behavior. Tokens are then traded in for rewards.
   3. Tokens = tangibles, like marbles, poker chips, board game pieces – they are not meaningful alone - their value is in the things that they can buy, just like the way we use money.
   4. Advantages:  
      ❖ Tokens can be given immediately and easily  
      ❖ They can be effective as an intermediate small reward, bridging the gap from positive behavior to the delivery of the more significant reward.  
      ❖ Tokens can be traded for many different rewards and thus help maintain a child’s interest and motivation.
2. **Setting up a Token Economy** 
   1. Identify 1-4 clear target behaviors that are part of routine activities at home – getting dressed, brushing teeth, eating breakfast. Start with relatively easy behaviors to ensure success from the beginning.
   2. May be easiest to pick one time of day to start (e.g., morning, afterschool, bedtime).
   3. When choosing behaviors to target, think about when you will monitor the target behaviors (e.g., is this behavior easy to spot and reward? Set up a time to do the monitoring. Monitoring behaviors first can be useful to collect baseline data to establish criteria, for example, to see how often the child does the behavior over a period of a few days.
   4. Once ready to set up the token system for the target behaviors, establish a schedule of how often to do token checks (e.g., every five minutes in the morning).
   5. If noncompliance and rule violations are happening frequently, add these as targets, for example by adding bonus points at the end of the day if no behavior rules are violated. E.g., 2 bonus tokens at bedtime if no hitting all day
   6. Select tokens that are well controlled by you to prevent child from stealing them.
   7. Establish expectations for earning tokens –the expectation should be well within the child’s ability (i.e., play appropriately with sibling for 10 minutes rather than 1 hour). Expectations can be increased as the child is more successful. Expectations should be set at no more than 20% higher than what the child already does.
   8. Only give tokens after target behavior has occurred (not after child has promised to do the behavior).
   9. Establish “store hours,” a time each day and week for banking when the child trades tokens in for rewards.
3. **Rewards**
   1. Variety: Keep it interesting. Children can get bored quickly with any given reward and lose motivation. The child needs a menu of rewards, including small, medium and large, so they can have instant gratification daily or save up for something over time.
   2. Guidelines for rewards
      1. Child should help select
      2. Should be rotated or changed frequently to maintain interest
      3. Caregivers should show enthusiasm when giving the rewards. Provide specific labeled praise when tokens and rewards are given.
      4. Include rewards that fit into your family’s existing routine when possible, to minimize things that you need to buy. Rewards can be activities, not “things”.
      5. Don’t be stingy with tokens! At first, reward every time the behavior occurs. As behavior improves, increase the cost of rewards, reduce value of tokens, or give fewer tokens.
      6. ONLY give out rewards when earned, i.e., child does the target behavior. Freebies reduce the potency of the rewards.
      7. Assign point values – Help caregivers think about the point value for earning tokens. If the child can earn 6 points (tokens) a day, a daily reward should be worth 4 points.

EXAMPLE CHART FOR HOME WORK

\_MATTHEW\_’s Token Chart

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Target Behavior  (clear, observable) | When checked? | Bravery Bucks |
| Complete “dental bravery challenge” | Right after challenge completed | 1 |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | **DAILY TOTAL:** | **10 tokens** |

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s Token Chart

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Target Behavior  (clear, observable) | When checked? | Bravery Bucks |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| BONUS: |  |  |
|  | **DAILY TOTAL:** |  |

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s Reward Menu

Daily

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reward | Bravery Bucks |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Medium/Weekly

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reward | Bravery Bucks |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Large

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reward | Bravery Bucks |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**\*Pro Tips for Caregivers**:

* Be sure to get your child’s input when making the rewards menu!
* Rewards don’t have to cost money. Think of fun privileges or experiences.
* Check these lists at least weekly with your child to make sure they still care about the things on the list. The same things get boring after a while. Change it up if they want to!
* If you child isn’t a strong reader yet, use pictures instead of words to represent rewards.
* Post this list in a visible place, like on the fridge.
* Make sure you have plenty of daily rewards and that the number of tokens you set for each reward is realistic for your child to earn. The younger your child, the less they can wait to “cash in” tokens
* When you child earns a token, make sure you give it to them and praise them right then in the moment

Sample Reward Menu Ideas

Daily:

* 1 token = 5 minutes of screen time Dessert after dinner
* 1 Wii game with parent
* 20 minutes later bedtime
* 30 minutes play on cell phone Extra book at bedtime
* Treat in lunchbox
* Listening to favorite music in car Watch TV during breakfast
* Day off from making bed
* Chewing gum
* 5 min extra Special Time

Weekly:

* Bake a special treat
* 1 hour board game of choice Invite a friend over
* Scavenger hunt
* Go out for ice cream
* Pick a rental movie
* Paint toenails
* Go to pet store to see puppies
* Day off from chores
* Special activity with parent Bubble bath
* Big Rewards (ask for your child’s input): Family bowling/mini-golf night Inexpensive toy
* Pick out shirt at Target
* Pet goldfish (earn tank, rocks, and plant first) Having a sleepover
* Eating favorite fast food
* Pick new book or art supply

Big Rewards (ask for your child’s input):

* Family bowling/mini-golf night
* Inexpensive toy
* Pick out shirt at Target
* Pet goldfish (earn tank, rocks, and plant first) Having a sleepover
* Eating favorite fast food
* Pick new book or art supply