

What are Group Contingencies?

Contingencies in the classroom describe if-then relationships between student behaviors and classroom events. A group contingency (GC) is a specific type of contingency that uses group reinforcement to capitalize on peer influence.

GROUP CONTINGENCY = If a **GROUP MEETS GOAL FOR BEHAVIOR** then that **GROUP OF STUDENTS IS REWARDED**

GCs set a group goal for behavior with a group reward for meeting the criteria. The purpose of this strategy is to prevent behavioral problems and increase appropriate behaviors. There are various ways to engineer a GC, but the overall structure is the same: students gain access to a reward if their behavior meets the goal set in place by the contingency.

Type	Definition	Example	Considerations
Dependent	One student (or a small group) earns a privilege or reward for the whole class by meeting specific behavioral goal. One student determines if the other students are rewarded.	If one specific student receives 3 or fewer marks for talking-out during a period, then the entire class earns five minutes of free time.	Reward is delivered dependent on one student's behavior, so this is beneficial for a student who likes peer attention and students with low social status because that student can earn the reward for the entire class. Ensure that the student is capable of the target behavior.
Independent	Students each earn the reward when they achieve the behavioral goal established for the group. The contingency is the same for all, but each student determines his or her own access to reward or privilege.	Any students who receives fewer than 3 marks for rule violations during a period will earn 5 mins of free time.	Reward is delivered for individual student behavior, so peer influence is minimal and there is little risk for peer pressure. However, this means there is also minimal peer momentum to support the target behavior.
Interdependent	The class, or group(s) within the class, earns a reward when the group meets an established goal. The group's behavior determines if the group gains access to the reward or privilege.	If the class receives fewer than 10 marks for off-task behaviors during a period, then all class members get to choose a food item reward.	Reward is delivered interdependent of group behavior, so earning the rewards is based on the collective behavior of the class or groups. This contingency applies positive peer influence; however, look out for students sabotaging or blaming peers.

How to Implement a Group Contingency and Tips for Effective Use of Group Contingency

1. Determine the target behavior to change.

- Combine target with other procedures and school-wide PBIS initiatives.
- Target behavior may be one you want to decrease
 - Examples: a certain problem behavior, infractions that occur during a certain time of day, overall classroom rule breaking.
- Target behavior may be one you want to increase
 - Examples: school-wide expectations, a certain pro-social behavior, cooperative group behavior during small group time, overall positive student interactions.

2. Select the most appropriate group contingency.

- Dependent is a good method if the goal is to improve the behavior of individual or small groups of individuals because it reinforces students who respond well to peer attention.
- Independent is a good method if the goal is to differentially reinforce behavior because it reinforces multiple goals for individuals
- Interdependent is a good method if the goal is to increase individual accountability within a group and whole class behavior because it fosters teamwork and the only way to earn the reward is as a group.

3. Set appropriate performance criterion with a behavior goal for students to earn the reward.

- a. Criterion is set for an individual, small group, or whole class.
- b. Base goal on students' current levels of target behavior. Always choose a reasonable goal and rig it so that students win at the beginning.
- c. Take baseline data to determine the average frequency of target behavior already occurring in classroom.
 - Example: Use a timer and tally marks to count how many total rule violations occur during 10 mins of seat work time.
 - Example: Have a co-teacher observe 3 dissimilar students and count the occurrences of student's on-task behavior during seat-work. Divide number of occurrences by 3.
- d. Gradually increase/ decrease the criteria based on student responsiveness and adjust the criterion if student behavior plateaus or drastically changes.

4. Choose an effective reward by soliciting student input and identifying multiple options.

- a. Carefully observe and consider what your students find reinforcing.
 - Consider reward preferences and variety. Use a student survey or preference assessment to determine reinforcers that are desired by your students.
 - Reward categories include free items (e.g., bathroom passes, extra/free time, lunch with teacher) or food items/tangibles (e.g., treat, school supplies, stickers).
- b. Determine if you will offer a single reward, several reward options, or an opportunity to earn tokens towards a bigger reward.
 - Decide if you will inform students of the reward at the start of the contingency or keep the reward a mystery until the end.
 - Plan for reward distribution (what, when, and how).

5. Implement the contingency plan, remaining consistent with your expectations and consequences.

- a. Communicate your plan with the class or group and seek student commitment.
- b. Set time limit for the contingency! 10-15 minutes is a great place to begin.
- c. Create a visual for students to monitor their own progress towards the goal.
- d. Establish a tracking method for your data during the contingency (e.g., individual student, small group, class roster with tally marks, group marks, or whole class data).
- e. Monitor and adjust to challenges and keep trying until you perfect your own method.

Evaluate Your Group Contingency

- Evaluate and adjust the group contingency: collect data on the effectiveness of the plan and determine how or if you will continue to use the plan.
- Reflect: "Should I change the behavior(s) addressed?"
 - Decide if your plan has been successful in improving the behavior and consider other behaviors that need to be targeted.
 - If the contingency is working, consider increasing criteria to earn the reward or selecting an additional target behavior.
- Reflect: "Should I adjust or change the contingency?"
 - Find out which students and groups are successful in achieving your criteria. If some students are not successful and are not earning the reward, then examine your plan carefully and modify it.

Resources**This guide was adapted from the following online resources:**

Curran, C., & the IRIS Center. (2003). Group contingencies. *Encouraging appropriate behavior*. 21-23. Retrieved from http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf_case_studies/ics_encappbeh.pdf

Additional Online Resources

Evertson, C., Poole, I., & the IRIS Center. (2003). Establishing classroom norms and expectations. Retrieved from http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf_case_studies/ics_norms.pdf

The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements: Addressing disruptive and noncompliant behaviors (Part 1): Behavioral interventions. <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/bi2/chalcycle.htm>

Select Research and Resources

- Hartman, Kelsey, & Gresham, Frank. (2016). Differential Effectiveness of Interdependent and Dependent Group Contingencies in Reducing Disruptive Classroom Behavior. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 32*(1), 1-23.
- Litow, L. & Pumroy, D.K. (1975). A brief review of classroom group-oriented contingencies. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis, 8*, 341-347.
- Speltz, M. L., Shimamura, J. W., & McReynolds, W. T. (1982). Procedural variations in group contingencies: effects on children's academic and social behaviors. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 15*(4), 533-544.
- Tankersley, M. (1995). A group-oriented contingency management program: A review of research on the good behavior game and implications for teachers. *Preventing School Failure, 40*, Fall 1995, 19-24.

For Further Reading

- Babyak, A.E., Luze, G.J., Kamps, D.M. (2000). The good student game: behavior management for diverse classrooms. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 35* (4), 216-223.
- Barrish, H. H., Saunders, M., & Wolf, M. M. (1968). Good behavior game: Effects of individual contingencies for group consequences on disruptive behavior in a classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 2*, 119-124.
- Kauffman, J. M., Mostert, M. P., Trent, S. C., & Hallahan, D. P. (2002). *Managing classroom behavior: A reflective case-based approach* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Skinner, C. H., Cashwell, T. H., & Skinner, A. L. (2000). Increasing tootling: The effects of a peer-monitored group contingency program on students' reports of peers' prosocial behaviors. *Psychology in the Schools, 37*, 263-270.