

Token Economies- Part II

We are going to talk more about Token Economies. We're spending two whole weeks on this because it is so useful, it is so powerful and it helps to really be creative and see other ideas and think about other ideas of how to implement this to really just get your brainstorm juices going, be creative. Think of different ways you can use this with your kiddos of all ages at different levels, do it as a group, do it for one kiddo. Token economy's are super useful and super powerful, so try it. Try some of these different formats, and these different ideas out.

We know what positive reinforcement right? Behavior occurs, something is added so the behavior happens more often, and really making sure the reward matches the effort. The token economy is a really easy way to make sure it is as soon as possible and give them a big reward every once in a while, not constantly. Give them that small token that builds up to trade in for the big reward.

We're going to review the definition of a token economy, we did this last week. It's a behavior change system with three components. We need the target behaviors, remember don't have 400 target behaviors, one to three. Choose your battles, prioritize what's really important and what your kiddos need to work on right now.

That means you might use the token economy this week for one behavior, and next week you might change your list of target behaviors. It'd be great if you got the first one under control and then next week we have something else we're going to keep working on.

Having that specific list of target behaviors, making sure your kiddos know what that is. You might think in your head, "Oh great, they're not back talking so much, so now let's work on getting them to do things quicker, to actually follow instructions without taking 10 minutes to get something small done," but if you don't tell your kiddo that, well, how are they going to follow through? How are they going to know the expectation? How are they going to access that reinforcement? Having the list of target behaviors and communicating it really clearly and to the point.

Then they get tokens or points or something for doing the target behavior, so what do they get for doing the target behavior? Then the menu of backup reinforcer items when you have so many tokens you get to trade it in.

A reward chart. These are off of Google. These are nothing fancy. A reward chart. Stickers, check marks, happy faces, color in the hearts, color in the star, whatever it is. Having just a simple chart to look at and see your progress towards your goal.

The sticker, or the check mark, or the coloring in, or you draw a happy face in it, or however you choose to use it, is the token, is that immediate reinforcer, "Oh my gosh, thank you so much for following directions, go put a sticker on your chart. Here's a crayon, go color in that heart." That's the immediate token, that's the immediate reinforcer. You can also just look at it and see how close you are to the finish line, how close you are to that goal of whatever the prize is, whatever the big reward is.

This top one, the super star weekly chart even has goal setting built in, so you don't have to always say how many, you can give them a choice. "Well do you think you should work for four or five? 19 or 20? Or whatever it may be.

These are some more homemade ones. The one on the top have five target behaviors, but they're at different times of day, so it's not too stressful I don't think. The bottom one is one that I've made and used many of times. You can get a treat, which we have a little treat box that has either little trinkets or actually edibles in it. If you get three, four or five, it's in that box we write the goal. If they're per day, if you get three of them, you can get your treat. If you want a prize, you need to get 15, so three full days in a row, or a few of them every day.

Setting the goals and having some small reinforcers along the way too can be helpful. Things to think about. How can you, with older kiddos, you might instead have just points that they get, or pennies, or quarters, or something like that and let them set the goals. Then with the small prizes, the treat would be extra screen time or something like that. Then the big prize is extra allowance money or getting to go do something.

Marble jar. This one we talked about a lot last week and it was on some of my visuals. Put some marbles in a jar, puff balls, those little craft puff balls in a jar is one we do. We also will do two jars, so one jar is full of what you need to earn and the other jar is empty, so ours currently says, "Obey," and a happy face. Anybody says, I mean it is a piece of paper with me scribble scratch and marker, scotch taped on there. Nothing fancy. When you obey, you get to take one from the obey jar and put it in the happy face jar, and when the happy face jar is full and the obey one is empty, you get something big, because our jars are pretty big and it's a lot of puff balls to earn.

You can do it however you want. You can have them see exactly how many they need to earn, or you can just go with the flow and kind of decide as you go. "That's pretty full, I'm going to give you your reward right now," but making sure that the marbles, the puff balls, the stickers, the points are immediate and that they're flowing. You get those often, there's lots of opportunity.

This other one is just one that I've made in Microsoft word. Again, you need so many for a treat and so many for a prize and then you have two chances a day. In the morning and in the afternoon, so this is more of a schedule based, a calendar based, and you only get two times a day that you earn it. That's when life was too hard and too ... it was too overwhelming for me to give five stickers a day in the morning and five in the afternoon and stay on it, so I made it scheduled based. At lunch time and at dinner time, really. Before nap or before bed was the time to reflect and say, "Well how was your behavior? Do you get the happy face? Do you get the sticker? Why not? Well, you got both of your happy faces today, you may have treat box. Well, you only got one, so we're not going to get a treat, that sort of thing.

Time based or not. You can do schedule based reinforcers, the morning, the afternoon, every hour. In school you'll see this a lot, broken up by the day. You earn the token at the same time every day. The pros of that is it's easier for mom and dad. It's easier to be consistent and it happens every day after a lunch, every day after dinner. Your kids help to remind you, because they know after dinner is when they can earn extra screen time, a treat, staying up a few minutes late. It's only a few times a day, but there's a downside to this.

There's not a right or a wrong answer here, should I do time based or not, it's just what works for you. Be aware of the pros and the cons. What's the downside? If you're only going to do it twice a day, you're going to do it at lunch time. Well, if your kiddo has a problem behavior at 7:30 in the morning, what is their motivation to behave from 7:30 to noon? It's gone, they have lost that reward, it's done, so the whole interval's over. It's kaput, so why should they ... what's the motivation, why should they work hard to turn their attitude around and have good behavior from now until noon?

Also, if they do extra great, you really can't reinforce extra. It's not built into the system, whereas if you just have this jar of marbles and you see your kiddo not only sharing, but also talking nicely and cleaning up after their sibling, and helping them out, and you're like, "You need five marbles right now because you're just being the best brother ever, you can't really do that if it's just one circle for the morning and one for the afternoon. It's not flexible. You can't go off the cuff and be creative along the way, but it is easy. It is easy to know that after lunch and after dinner, I need to reward my kid or not, and we need to have a conversation about their behavior.

More ideas to make it more effective. Obviously you don't need to set up a counter like at Chuck E. Cheese or the bowling alley, or wherever, arcades have these things. You can set up the same idea. This many marbles equals candy, this many marbles equals staying up late, this many marbles equals an outing, this many marbles equals, whatever the rewards are for your kiddo.

You can make a menu of choices. You can have physical choices like this and label them. That sounds like a lot of work, but you can do it or you can just make a list. Ask your kiddo to help you design the system. Let them be a part of it. It gets their buy-in so much easier and the system will likely be more effective for getting through to them if they have a hand in choosing things. Having that menu of reinforcers. You can have pictures of them, you can watch a video of it. Really get them interested in what the rewards are. Make sure all the family members are on board.

Giving the tokens as often as possible, that's the key in the beginning, especially the more frequent, the better in the beginning.

Use it when you need it. You do not have to have a sticker chart every single day for the rest of your life, but when you're having a problem behavior, when there's a big transition coming up and you know things are likely to be harder, when it's summer time and you're totally off schedule and you've been staying up really late and the wheels are starting to fall off, well it's building a little bit of this system.

Use it when you need it and then fade it out. How do we fade it out when we're done with it? When we feel like things are going smoothly and we're thinking, "I don't want to be doing this for the rest of my life, so let's get rid of it for a while." There are easy ways to fade it out, so you don't just rip the band-aid off and take it away, which could cause problems. First thing is to just increase the number of tokens. That makes it harder to access that terminal reinforcer. That makes it harder, more work on your kiddos to get the big prize. Longer time between each token.

In the beginning, you want short time, token, token, token, token, token, every good thing they do. Then as you've been doing it, you can stretch that longer and longer. I'm not saying use a clock and a timer and every five minutes we need to give a token. No, just ... you don't have to be so hyper-vigilant about it if you're trying to fade it out. Lots of praise, lots of attention, all those other reinforcers. We don't want to drop, but we don't have to give a token every single time.

You could fade it to a chore chart or a responsibility chart. Things that are a little more natural in our homes depending on their age. A list of expectations, something that still offers some support, but isn't this big system that takes time and effort. I would just be direct with them. Tell your child how you are thrilled with that they don't need this support, but big rewards are available at any time, just stay on your best behavior, so now we don't have a chart that says when we get to go get ice cream, but if we've had several good days, I'm paying attention and I will take you to get ice cream.

We aren't earning stickers for that, but it's still available, and as long as you and your siblings keep having great behavior and we don't have any major problems, then yeah, we can totally go get ice cream every once in a while or whatever the reward is. Just making sure they know that that stuff is still there and we just get to go do it for fun as long as we don't have any major problems.

Change it up so no one gets bored. The format alone can change everything. In my house, obviously we do a lot of this considering my career choice, but I have an app on my phone, I have multiple versions of sticker charts just recently. I made a big block letter E, which is my child's initial and then just drew boxes inside of that, so she got to fill her initial with stickers.

We've done a puff ball jar. She will tell me what she's interested in. Once we earn the big reward, we earn the terminal reinforcer and the next day I'll say, "Do you want to start another one? Do you want to earn something else?" Sometimes she'll be interested and sometimes she'll just say, "No thanks," I'm like, "Okay, as long as things are going well we don't need it," or, I'll give her some choices or she'll tell me, "Well can I have sticker chart this time and we can use those lightning McQueen stickers?" "Well sure, let me make you something cool."

Changing the format alone can get the buy-in, can get them more interested and they don't get bored. Change up the rewards. Don't just have one menu of choices that they're not really interested in. Go back to that finding reinforcers for a kiddo. What are they into right now? Ask them, "what would you like to earn?" There's no telling what they're going to come up with. Then changing up those target behaviors.

As we get things under control, add in something different, change up the wording of it, make sure that you're prioritizing what you need, but also not beating a dead horse where you're always trying out the same thing over, and over and over, so change it up a little bit.

You can use different visuals to make it more effective. You can draw pictures of the target behaviors, you can find Google images of them, you could have check lists, reminders. The more visuals that you can use, if you're needing them, the less nagging that has to take place.

If their reminder is you pointing to a picture, that's a lot easier, it's less intrusive and there's not an opportunity for arguing. A kiddo cannot argue with a picture on the wall or a list of what needs to happen. Using those visuals can really be supportive for you and your children.

There's something called reinforcer sampling, which is what it sounds like, sample the reinforcer. Give the little taste of it. You can do this when you first start, or if you feel like they were earning a lot of tokens, then they're not and you feel like this is stretching them forever and they're never, ever going to get access to whatever it is, well give them a little sample of it. Get them a taste.

For the edibles, it's like literally an actual bite of food. If it's something else like it, you can look at the reinforcer choices like we said a minute ago, look at pictures, watch a video of it. If screen time is an issue, well let's watch a couple of minutes and then you can earn the rest of it on your sticker chart or your marble jar, or whatever it is.

Some pitfalls to avoid. Some problems that you don't want to make. Too long of a period between tokens. If you give a token once a day, that's not very motivating. Making sure that you are seeing and increase the undesired behaviors. This should start working right away. If you're increasing reinforcement, you should be seeing more good behaviors. If you're not, then increase faster, reward faster.

Using rewards your kids don't want, so you're like, "Earn your tokens and you can watch a movie," and they're like, "We watched three movies at summer camp this week at the YMCA and we don't want to watch a movie," or whatever it may be. You're offering rewards they're not interested in. Make sure that they want them. Let them decide, let them choose.

Also, if only one parent gives the tokens, this can happen real easily with a stay at home mom, or a stay at home dad. Whoever's home all day is on top of the system and knows what's going on, and is on it and really working on this, then the parent who works outside the home may forget about it after a full day of work, so being on the same plan with your spouse or any other care givers, team members, whoever is working with your kiddo, make sure that y'all are all onboard together.

Then something that can happen is the kiddo seems really into it, "Yes I want my marble," and then the next time, "You did such a great job, let me give you your marble, and they're like, "I don't want it." Okay, that happens, but don't stop. Just because they don't want it that second, just because they don't want to do their own sticker, color their own happy face, or whatever you're doing, give it to them anyway. Do it for them and just move on, don't make a big deal out of it, because 30 minutes later, an hour later, the next day, they earn another one, they might be really into it again. They'll likely be really into it as you get to the very end and they're about to earn their big reward.

If you forget to give one, they don't really care, do it anyway. Help them get to that bigger reward, help them earn it, they will buy-in again. Make it work for you. Be creative, use it when you need it. Don't use it all the time, that's a lot of work. It's too much effort. Use it when you need it. Make it portable if you need to. If you're traveling, if you're just busy and all over the place, well then, get the app on your phone. Put it in your purse, in your bag, in their backpack, well whatever you need and get portable and keep it interesting.

This should be fun, because it is a focus on the positive. Everything about this is on the positive. Focusing on the good stuff. Those target behaviors, good things that we want to see more of. The tokens, every single one we celebrate, "Thank you so much for obeying, here is this awesome sticker and it's a big deal and we're excited about it.

Everything is positive, so use it but make it work for you. Be creative. You can change the format, you can change the rewards, you can change the targeted behaviors, you can change the frequency of how often you give the tokens, you can change the frequency of how often they get the big rewards. Make it work for you, and I hope you enjoy it as much as we do, because it does build up those desired behaviors, which should make less room for the problems.