

Token Economy: Generalization of Desired Behaviors

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Abstract

A proposal on the generalization process for a program is supported by a literature review and data from the Philhaven Wellspan Lancaster Therapeutic After School Program. The current distribution of reward is provided through behavior bucks which is paper money that allows clients to buy different prizes. The behavior bucks given to each client per night is tracked and recorded, and this information is provided to display the continuous reinforcement schedule. To implement the generalization process, I propose that the staff begins to put each client, once they have learned the desired behavior, on an interval ratio schedule. This schedule will permit a reward for an average number of responses. The parents will be provided with behavior bucks to reward their children with at home and will be told to only distribute the reward or reinforcer after every third behavior until the behavior is no longer reinforced by behavior bucks. This method will allow the client to find natural reinforcers from the situation and transfer the desired behavior from program to settings such as school and home.

Creative Commentary

In this project, I have constructed a literature review of research on behavior modification and the generalization process and made a proposal based on this research. The idea is based on data and experiences I have gained during the internship at Philhaven Wellspan Therapeutic After School Program. The program consists of children ages five to fourteen who have mental diagnoses and need therapeutic guidance in behavioral and social skills. Teaching skills with the use of a reward system is a working technique but generalizing the newly learned behaviors to other settings such as school and home is

where the inconsistency lies. Pairing the internship experience with a behavior modification class has made the generalization process a possible solution.

There are two processes to wean a child off of a token economy; at the Philhaven Wellspan Therapeutic After School Program a token economy is earning behavior bucks (paper money) for good target behavior from the clients, which can be used to buy prizes. The two processes are to eliminate tokens gradually or decrease the value of tokens gradually (Martin and Pear, 2014). Eliminating tokens gradually is a more practical process for the After School Program. I propose that the After School Program should identify desired behaviors

of each client so the parents are aware of what behavior to reinforce. Following a successful discharge once the client has met all of their goals, the staff will provide the parents with behavior bucks to use at home. The parents will be told to reward the behavior every third time they see it occur. As the behavior increases the client will receive the reward less and less until the verbal praise is naturally reinforcing and the reward is no longer needed. The rareness of the reward will strengthen the reinforcement until the natural environment becomes the reward (Martin and Pear, 2014). To support this proposal, I will provide data from the After School Program including graphs of how many behavior bucks are earned by each client per day. This graph will show the continuous schedule that the behavior bucks are currently rewarded on. Starting an interval ratio schedule once the behavior is learned will allow the behavior to be rewarded after an average number of responses (Martin and Pear, 2014). Rewarding the desired behavior to strengthen the alternative behavior that the clients once had will extinguish the problem behavior. Failure occurs during extinction of problem behaviors when the alternative behavior is not appropriately strengthened. The problem behavior may be the result of a negatively reinforced conditioned response. If the problem behavior is tearing up homework and tearing up homework was paired with the unconditioned stimulus of a nagging parent, the child would tear up the homework to avoid the nagging from the parent to complete homework. Research on the extinction process, generalization, conditioned stimulus, and reinforcement schedules will provide parents and professionals with the information on what behaviors to reinforce and how to get the target behavior to transfer effectively to different settings.

Eliminating tokens gradually will best generalize the behavior seen at the program to settings such as school and home. A kit consisting of behavior bucks and behaviors to reward will be provided to the parent. A list of motivators or activities the client may find interesting will also be provided. Desired behavior will be rewarded with enjoyable activities but extracurricular activities will not be used as leverage in order to keep the extrinsic motivation to the activity.

With the use of behavior bucks at home, parents will be able to replace the reward system with natural rewards in the environment and behavior will be performed because it is naturally reinforcing.

References

Martin, G., & Pear, J. (2014). Behavior modification what it is and how to do it (10th ed.). NY: Routledge.

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