

## What Is It?

A *group contingency* is where the teacher reinforces the entire class or a smaller group of students for completing tasks, appropriate classroom behaviors, or other targeted behavior. Group contingencies can address problem behaviors of multiple students at once. They are more efficient than individual reward systems and require less time to monitor. They also help teachers avoid singling out an individual student with problem behaviors, even if that student is the only one needing support.

## When to Use It

- Group contingencies are most often used as a basic classroom management strategy.
- Group contingencies can also address an individual student whose behaviors serve a variety of functions.
- Group contingencies can be used when the activity or instruction is new or particularly difficult.
- Group contingencies can be used to increase participation in an activity.
- Group contingencies can be used to help establish classroom rules and routines (asking for help, putting materials away, etc.).
- Group contingencies can be used when larger groups of students need additional supports to remain on-task and engaged in classroom activities, particularly independent activities.
- Group contingencies can be used when peers could provide an appropriate model for a target behavior. For example, the target behavior might be accessing help appropriately. The group contingency could be to first ask a friend before raising a hand for adult help. The peer models in the group could demonstrate asking a friend in the group or raising a hand to access adult help.

## Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

	1. Before you begin an activity that you anticipate will be difficult for students, or hard to engage them in, consider using a group contingency.
	2. First, determine which target behaviors will be acknowledged. Examples of appropriate classroom behaviors are when students are helpful to others, or raise their hands without talking.
	3. Choose which reward the students will work toward or earn access to (end of the week recess, game day, etc.). You can learn the students' interests and motivations by completing a reinforcer assessment.
	4. Decide what you will use to count the appropriate behaviors (marble jar, sticker chart, letters on the board, etc.).
	5. Decide how many counters will be needed to reach the goal (fill up the entire marble jar, 25 stickers on the sticker chart, spell the teacher's name on the board, etc.).
	6. The first day you use it, teach the students how the contingency works. Provide specific examples of behaviors ("I'm looking for groups who are in their seats, quiet mouths, with eyes on me").
	7. Provide the reinforcement for the target behavior to the entire class or group ("Great job, Group 3. Everyone has their materials out and ready to go. Your group earns a point").

## Example

Charles is a third grader identified with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He has a hard time remaining on task. He often tries to get the attention of his friends and classmates during teacher instruction and in-class work time.

Charles's teacher, Ms. Jackson, is having a difficult time supporting Charles's behavior and constantly has to redirect him to reengage in his work. With a class of 27 students, Ms. Jackson has little additional time available to support Charles. She requests support from the behavior intervention team, and they conduct a function based assessment (FBA). They determine that the function of Charles's behavior is to gain attention from peers, and to escape having to complete assignments in class. Based on the results of the FBA, the team decides to implement a group contingency point system.

Ms. Jackson arranges the classroom by pushing student desks together into groups of four. She numbers each group, and writes the numbers at a top corner of the whiteboard. Then she announces to the class that she'll be giving five points to any group where all the group members complete the day's assignment. Also, she says she will give additional points, periodically, to groups that are working together quietly. In the days that follow, she remembers to specifically praise Charles for sitting quietly. Rather than singling out misbehaviors, she gives Charles's group additional points when she catches him on-task and engaged in his work. To monitor the effectiveness of the intervention, Ms. Jackson collects data on the percentage of in-class work that is completed.

## How to Increase Effectiveness

- Strategically group students who work well together.
- Deliver positive behavior-specific praise.
- Avoid calling out specific students or challenging behaviors ("Great job working quietly and together, Group 3").
- Structure the classroom to support group contingencies (students select group names).
- Increase class buy-in by changing reinforcers often, keeping their preferences in mind.
- Implement a different type of group contingency. There are three different types: dependent, independent and interdependent.
- Be aware of the potential for an individual student to feel positive peer-pressure from other group members, or for an individual to sabotage their group's responses.

## Resources

Chow, J. C., & Gilmour, A. F. (2016). Designing and implementing group contingencies in the classroom: A teacher's guide. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 48(3), 137-143.

Hirsch, S. E., MacSuga-Gage, A., Park, K., & Dillon, S. (2016). A road map to systematically setting up a group contingency. *Beyond Behavior*, 25, 21-29.

McKenna, J. W., & Flower, A. (2014). Get them back on track: Use of the good behavior game to improve student behavior. *Beyond Behavior*, 23(2), 20-26.