

What Is It?

A group contingency is a strategy where an adult reinforces, rewards, or acknowledges groups of children for specific behaviors. For young children, group contingencies are often designed as games. Each time an adult notices a group of children engaging in appropriate or desired behaviors, the group may earn recognition in the game (e.g., earn a token, move a piece on a class bulletin board). Group contingencies can encourage positive social behaviors of multiple children at once. They are more efficient than individual reward systems and require less time to monitor. They also help adults avoid singling out an individual child for behavior change, even if that child is the only one needing support.

When to Use It

- As a universal classroom management strategy.
- To address an individual child's challenging behavior.
- When the activity or instruction is new or particularly difficult.
- To increase participation in an activity.
- To establish classroom rules and routines (requesting help, cleaning up, etc.).
- When larger groups of children would benefit from additional supports to remain on-task and engaged in classroom activities, particularly independent activities.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Consider using a group contingency before you begin an activity that you anticipate will be difficult for children or hard to engage them in.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Determine which target behaviors will be acknowledged. Examples of appropriate classroom behaviors are when children are helpful to others or raise their hands without talking.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Choose the reward children will work toward or earn access to (dance party, game day, etc.). Observe children carefully to see what kinds of activities result in the highest levels of group engagement in order to learn the children's interests and motivations. Offer choices for the reward so that children are involved in the selection, which may increase motivation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Decide what you will use to count the appropriate behaviors (marble jar, sticker chart, letters on the board, etc.).

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>5. Decide how many counters will be needed to reach the goal (fill up the entire marble jar, 10 stickers on the sticker chart, spell the teacher's name on the board, fill an apple tree bulletin board with apples, etc.).</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>6. Teach the children how the contingency works. Provide specific examples of behaviors ("I'm looking for children who clean up their play areas right away, help a friend, and join me on the carpet.").</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>7. Provide reinforcement for the target behavior to the entire class or group ("Great job, Green Table. Everyone washed their hands, sat down, and is ready for lunch. I'm adding a star to our board.>").</p>

Example

Charles is a 3-year-old with developmental delays. He often tries to get the attention of his friends and classmates during adult-led activities. Charles's teacher, Jackson, is having a difficult time supporting Charles's behavior and constantly redirects him during group activities. With a class of 18 students, Jackson has little additional time available to support Charles. The teaching assistant, Bette, sits with Charles during all group activities to keep him engaged, but he still leaves the group space, touches his peers, and grabs materials. Jackson 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 avoid adult-led activities like story time. Based on the results of the FBA, the team decides to implement a group contingency point system.

Jackson designs a game board that is posted at the front of the group area. He adds a moveable picture of the class mascot: a turtle named Tommy. He uses some of Charles' favorite colors to decorate the board game path. Then he announces to the class that they will be helping Tommy Turtle reach his home in the pond. Every time he notices children listening, responding to the story, or helping one another, he will move Tommy one space. When Tommy gets to his pond, the class will celebrate with a special Turtle Dance Party. In the days that follow, Jackson remembers to specifically praise Charles for sitting quietly. Rather than singling out misbehaviors, he gives Charles additional points when he catches him engaged in group time. To monitor the effectiveness of the intervention, Jackson collects data on the percentage of children engaged during group time.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- Offer positive behavior-specific praise when children work toward the group goal.
- Avoid calling out specific children or challenging behaviors, focus instead on groups or the whole class and positive behavior ("The kids in the block area are doing a great job working quietly and together. I'm adding an apple to our class tree!").
- Increase buy-in by changing reinforcers often, keeping child preferences in mind.

Resources

Chazin, K.T. & Ledford, J.R. (2016). [Dependent group contingencies](#). In *Evidence-based instructional practices for young children with autism and other disabilities*.

Chazin, K.T. & Ledford, J.R. (2016). [Class-wide reward systems](#). In *Evidence-based instructional practices for young children with autism and other disabilities*.

Pokorski, E. A. (2019). [Group contingencies to improve classwide behavior of young children](#). *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 51(5), 340-349.