

Autism Initiative: Training Series

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 3.2: Part 4 – Token Economy

Part 1: Review of Concepts:

- A *token economy* is a reinforcement system in which conditioned reinforcers, called *tokens* are given to individuals for engaging in appropriate behavior. These tokens are later exchanged for other reinforcing items called *backup reinforcers*.
 - A *generalized conditioned reinforcer* is a type of conditioned reinforcer that can be paired with many different types of backup reinforcers.
 - A *backup reinforcer* is any tangible object, activity or privilege that functions as a reinforcer.
- Token economies allow for immediate reinforcement through the use of conditioned reinforcers and they are easy to carry and collect. They also represent individualization as the tokens can represent a wide range of backup reinforcers based on individual preference.

Part 2: Discussion Questions for Staff

1. *Why would you use a token economy?*

- **Answer:** Token economies are structured systems that can be used to change behavior. They are often used to increase the occurrence of desirable behaviors. However, some also incorporate elements to decrease the occurrence of undesirable behaviors.

2. *What are some advantages of using a token economy?*

- **Answer:** Token economies are/can:
 - Easier to use than immediate reinforcement
 - Tokens are generally easy to carry and collect
 - Represent a variety of reinforcers which can help reduce satiation that can occur when only one reinforcer is being used
 - Help teaching delay of gratification because individuals have to wait and save up tokens before gaining access to a reinforcer

3. *What are some examples of generalized conditioned reinforcers?*

- **Answer:** Examples of generalized conditioned reinforcers include:
 - Money
 - Social attention
 - Points

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4. *What are some examples of back-up reinforcers?*
 - **Answer:** Back-up reinforcers should be selected based on an individual's preferences. They should be things that the individual likes and do not have frequent access to in the natural environment. So back-up reinforcers will vary depending on the individual and may include things like: a preferred movie, a special game, and preferred activities.
5. *Why would it be important to limit access to the reinforcers being used for a token economy?*
 - **Answer:** If an individual has unlimited access to a reinforcer throughout the day then it can lose its value as a reinforcer because its presentation does not become associated with engaging in the target behaviors. In addition, if an individual has unlimited access to the reinforcer then it may lose its value due to satiation.
6. *Do tangible tokens have to be a part of every token economy?*
 - **Answer:** Points are another way that individuals gain access to reinforcers. The decision to use points or tangible tokens may be based on an individual's level of functioning.
7. *How do you think a token economy could be used in a group residential setting?*
 - **Answer:** There is not a "correct" answer for this question. Encourage discussion among staff about their thoughts.