Behavioral Interventions and Strategies Series:
The Good Behavior Game

When to use: To reduce the amount of inappropriate or disruptive behavior and increase on-task behavior using group-based contingencies.

Why use: The Good Behavior Game has been shown to be effective in reducing disruptive and aggressive behaviors across elementary and middle school grades as well as across student populations; its effectiveness has also been shown to have an impact on student behavior in subsequent grades.[4] This intervention reduces inappropriate behaviors without the use of or reliance upon positive social reinforcement (praise) and frequent tangible reinforcers (treats, toys, etc.).[1]

Brief Description: The Good Behavior Game uses competition between teams of students and group incentives to reduce disruptive behaviors. A set of rules is provided along with criteria for receiving a reward or privilege. Rewards are provided to teams that do not exceed the criteria for rule violations.[4]

Materials: Display listing classroom rules. Board or chart divided into sections for each team with a column for each day of the week and team members' names (optional). List of rewards and privileges and any materials needed for rewards.

Procedure:

Introduction & Training

- Choose a time to implement the game (preferably a time when students are most unproductive and/or behaviors are most disruptive—this can be determined through observation and baseline data collection. Inform students that the class will be playing a game to help everyone benefit more from the period. Indicate when the game will and will not be played.

- Divide the class into teams (2 to 3) of approximately equal numbers of students (male/female, students with behavior problems, etc.). Assign teams keeping location in mind—it will be easier to monitor teams and provide rewards if they are based on desk groups or rows. If you like, allow teams to choose a name—team spirit increases and it makes it easier to reward and reprimand teams using their unique names.

- Create a chart on a chalk/whiteboard or poster with team names or numbers, a row/column for each day of the week, and team member names (if desired).

- Explain the procedures of the game and the criterion for the maximum number of demerits allowed to still earn a reward. Describe rewards for winning teams. Review classroom rules and demonstrate giving demerits for infractions.

	Team	Team
M	IIII	II
T	I	II
W	III	IIIII
T	IIII	III
F	III	IIII

Implementation

- Conduct brief review of rules and game criterion at the beginning of the game-playing (intervention) period

- During the game-playing period, record a demerit next to the team name (or individual team member name) each time a student violates a rule. Explain the reason for the demerit as you record it: say, "Jimmy, that's a "calling out," while placing the mark in the team column or next to the team member name.

- Tally demerits at the end of the game-playing period and determine which teams, if any, met the criterion. All teams that did not exceed the criterion receive the reward.

- Begin with playing the Good Behavior Game 3 times a week for 15 minutes or during the chosen instructional period. Increase the length of playing time by approximately 10 minutes every 3 weeks—up to a maximum of 3 hours.

- Adjust criterion slightly, as necessary, for longer periods of game play. However, gradually lower the criterion to no more than 4 or 5 infractions per day.

- When first implementing the game, announce the Good Behavior Game period and deliver rewards immediately or as soon as possible. As students become more familiar with the game, begin the game without announcing it at different times of the day, during different activities, and in different settings. Delay rewards until the end of the day.

- When the game has been implemented for several weeks, fade rewards to once a week. Reward teams meeting criterion for rewards for 4 of 5 days.
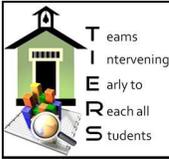
Variations:

1. Using Response Cost
- Begin game by giving each team a set number of credits (e.g. 12 credits). Set minimum criterion for receiving a reward at the end of the game-playing period (e.g. 6 credits remaining).
- Remove a credit for each rule violation (instead of giving a demerit).
- Provide reward to team(s) that meet or exceed the criterion (e.g. 6 or more credits remaining).
- Field testing and teacher report has indicated this variation is more effective and preferred than the original procedure involving the recording of demerits.

2. Using Mystery Motivators
- Implement the Good Behavior Game as described originally or in Variation 1.
- Place a piece of paper describing a reward on it in an envelope with a question mark written on it. Display the envelope where all students can see it. Inform students that the winning teams will receive the reward written on the slip of paper in the envelope.
- Open the envelope at the end of the day and provide the reward listed to team(s) that meet criterion.
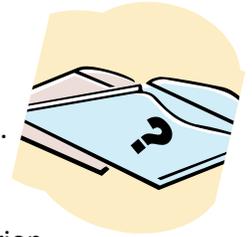
3. Using a "Better Behavior Booster"
- Provide a larger group reward (e.g. a homework pass, 10 extra minutes of free time) at the end of the week to teams who have 5 or fewer "extra" rule infractions (infractions exceeding the criterion each period/day). Record extra infractions on the chart so teams can see their progress throughout the week. Provide reward at the end of the week to all teams who meet the "extra rule infractions" criterion.
- This variation is designed to help keep the number of rule violations from increasing if a team has exceeded the limit for infractions during a game period or day and is no longer eligible to receive the reward.

4. Using the Good Behavior Game Plus Merit
- Follow procedures for introducing the Good Behavior Game. Include description of how students can earn merit points: Merit cards will be given to students who display designated positive academic and/or social behaviors.
- During the game-playing period, record demerits for teams/team members who violate rules. Record merits for teams/team members (using a "+") on the chart. Another option for merits is to provide merit cards when appropriate behaviors are displayed; ask students hold up earned merit cards at the end of the game period and record merits for each team/team member on the chart and collect merit cards. Erase or mark through 1 demerit for each team for every 5 merits earned by team members.
  - Follow procedures described previously for rewarding teams daily or weekly.
  - This variation is preferable when there is concern regarding focusing solely on inappropriate behaviors.
  - This variation can be combined with the Response Cost variation procedures, which has been shown to be preferable for teachers and more effective than the Good Behavior Game Plus Merit procedures alone.

Keep in Mind: Some students may decide that they are not going to play the game. If this happens, inform the class that it is unfair to penalize the team for a few students who cannot control their behavior. Create an additional team of students who display chronic problem behaviors and add a negative contingency (e.g. losing teams lose free time privileges). Should the problem continue, consider meeting with individual students to help identify factors contributing to problem behaviors and provide ideas for how to support the student engaging in replacement behaviors.

References
1. Barrish, H. H., Saunders, M., & Wolf, M. M. (1969). Good behavior game: Effects of individual contingencies for group consequences on disruptive behavior in a classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, *2*, 119-124.
2. Evidence Based Intervention (EBI) Network. See http://ebi.missouri.edu for more information.
3. Kellem, S. G., Ling, X., Merisca, R., Brown, C. H., & Ialongo, N. (1998). The effect of the level of aggression in the first grade classroom on the course and malleability of aggressive behavior into middle school. *Development and Psychopathology*, *10*, 1650185.
4. Rathvon, N. (2008). *Effective school interventions, Second Edition: Evidence-based strategies for improving student outcomes* (pp. 83-84). New York: The Guilford Press.