CBT+ Home Token Economy Guide for Therapists: Example Session Outline and Handouts

Below are handouts and an example session outline for introducing and setting up a home token economy. It was designed for caregivers of children with ADHD and disruptive behavior concerns but can be applied more broadly. These materials have been adapted by CBT+ from materials initially developed and shared with the CBT+ team by Erin Schoenfelder Gonzalez, Ph.D., of the Seattle Children's Hospital Partnership Access Line.

Sample Caregiver Session Outline

Caregiver Handouts (included at the bottom):

- ❖ Principles of a Token System
- ❖ Sample Reward Ideas
- ❖ Reward Menu
- ❖ Token Chart- Example Brainstorm Form
- ❖ Token Chart- Blank Brainstorm Form

Introduce the Concept of Incentive Systems

1. Introduce
   a. Ask caregivers if they have tried a sticker chart or chore chart before. Explain that most families have, and find that stickers lose effectiveness over time. Ask if they are interested to discuss ways to use a slightly different strategy for increasing compliance and decreasing disruptive behaviors.

2. Review of Positive Reinforcement
   a. Positive reinforcement is a response to a behavior that makes the behavior more likely to occur again. The positive reinforcer follows after the desired behavior – i.e., if the behavior occurs, then the positive reinforcer is given.
   b. For kids with ADHD, often just noticing and praising positive behavior isn't quite enough, and building in additional rewards really helps.
   c. Caregivers often give privileges or rewards without the expectation that they are tied to behavior. Linking privileges or rewards to behavior expectations is a powerful way to improve behavior.

Setting Up a Home Token Economy

1. Key Concepts
   a. One purpose of the token economy is to make it clear to the child what they are supposed to do. Having written expectations (e.g., posted on a chart) serve this purpose.

b. A second purpose is to state clearly to the child what rewards the child will earn for following the expectations. Because children with ADHD do best with immediate consequences, it is important to immediately use tokens as the rewards for the behavior. Tokens are then traded in for rewards.

c. Tokens = tangibles, like marbles, poker chips, board game pieces – they are not meaningful alone - their value is in the things that they can buy, just like the way we use money.

d. Advantages:
   ❖ Tokens can be given immediately and easily
   ❖ They can be effective as an intermediate small reward, bridging the gap from positive behavior to the delivery of the more significant reward.
   ❖ Tokens can be traded for many different rewards and thus help maintain a child's interest and motivation.

2. **Principles of Using Reward System**

Review principles as outlined in the parent Principles of a Token System handout.

3. **Setting up a Token Economy**
   a. Identify 1-4 clear target behaviors that are part of routine activities at home – getting dressed, brushing teeth, eating breakfast. Start with relatively easy behaviors to ensure success from the beginning.
   b. May be easiest to pick one time of day to start (e.g., morning, afterschool, bedtime).
   c. When choosing behaviors to target, help caregivers think about when they will monitor the target behaviors (e.g., is this behavior easy to spot and reward? Have caregivers set up a time to do the monitoring. Monitoring behaviors first can be useful to collect baseline data to establish criteria, for example, to see how often the child does the behavior over a period of a few days.
   d. Once ready to set up the token system for the target behaviors, help caregivers establish a schedule of how often to do token checks (e.g., every five minutes in the morning).
   e. If noncompliance and rule violations are happening frequently, caregivers can add these as targets, for example by adding bonus points at the end of the day if no behavior rules are violated. E.g., 2 bonus tokens at bedtime if no hitting all day
   f. Select tokens that are well controlled by the caregivers to prevent child from stealing them.
   g. Establish expectations for earning tokens –the expectation should be well within the child's ability (i.e., play appropriately with sibling for 10 minutes rather than 1 hour). Expectations can be increased as the child is more successful. Expectations should be set at no more than 20% higher than what the child already does.
   h. Only give tokens after target behavior has occurred (not after child has promised to do the behavior).
   e. Establish "store hours," a time each day and week for banking when the child trades tokens in for rewards.

4. **Rewards**
    a) Variety: Keep it interesting. Children can get bored quickly with any given reward and lose motivation. The child needs a menu of rewards, including small, medium and large, so they can have instant gratification daily or save up for something over time. Refer to <u>HANDOUT: Sample Reward Menu</u>
    b) Guidelines for rewards
        ❖ Child should help select
        ❖ Should be rotated or changed frequently to maintain interest
        ❖ Caregivers should show enthusiasm when giving the rewards. Provide specific labeled praise when tokens and rewards are given.
        ❖ Include rewards that fit into family's existing routine when possible, to minimize things that caregivers need to buy. Rewards can be activities, not "things".
        ❖ Don't be stingy with tokens! At first, reward every time the behavior occurs. As behavior improves, increase the cost of rewards, reduce value of tokens, or give fewer tokens.
        ❖ ONLY give out rewards when earned, i.e., child does the target behavior. Freebies reduce the potency of the rewards.
    c) Assign point values – Help caregivers think about the point value for earning tokens. If the child can earn 6 points (tokens) a day, a daily reward should be worth 4 points.

Working with the Caregivers – Using the Handouts

1. Review <u>HANDOUT: Token Chart Example Brainstorm Form</u> and help caregivers create one on the blank <u>HANDOUT: Token Chart Brainstorm Form</u>.
2. Review <u>HANDOUT: Sample Reward Menu Ideas</u> and help caregivers create on the blank <u>HANDOUT Reward Menu Form.</u>
3. Role play
    a. Introducing system to child
    b. Scenario in which child successfully completes the target behavior under the caregivers supervision. Give tokens and use labeled praise.
    c. Role play scenario in which child fails to complete target behavior. Withhold tokens in a matter-of-fact manner.
    d. Role play scenario in which the child "tests the system" and says I don't care, etc. Do not argue or plead. State, "It is your choice to earn a token/reward or not" and walk away.

Principles of a Token System

Goal: To increase your child's motivation to meet expectations and their independence in monitoring their behavior.

Choose Behaviors to Reward

CLEAR & OBSERVABLE. Define the behavior, when it is expected, and how many warnings given

SCHEDULED. Pick behaviors that occur as part of a routine or in order to start, like morning or after school.

Giving Tokens

TANGIBLE. Give a "token" that can be seen and held, like a marble or poker chip.

AFTER BEHAVIOR. The reinforcement must occur *after* the behavior occurs, not "on promise."

IMMEDIATE. The reward must be given *immediately* after the behavior occurs (i.e. present a token or write in a point on the spot, not at the end of the day)

CONSISTENT. Tokens must be given every time in the beginning. Eventually, once your child is meeting expectations often, it can be faded out.

INDEPENDENT OF OTHER BEHAVIORS. Rewards earned through the token system should not be taken away, regardless of other behavior, in the first few weeks of the system.

Choosing Rewards

VARIETY. Provide your child with choices of rewards to keep their interest; change the choices often and include your child in choosing rewards.

NATURAL REWARDS. Rewards that fit in naturally with the behavior or your daily routine (i.e. TV time when homework is completed on time) are better than options that take extra time and effort to provide (i.e. an outing, toy).

BIG AND SMALL: It can be helpful to have small rewards that can be earned daily to keep children's interest, but also larger, more exciting rewards that hold interest over time.

NOVEL/EXCITING. Rewards should be things that your child will not get otherwise. If they get to have a friend over regardless of whether or not they earn it, this would not be a good option

Sample Reward Menu Ideas

Daily:

1 token = 5 minutes of screen time

Dessert after dinner

1 Wii game with parent

20 minutes later bedtime

30 minutes play on cell phone

Extra book at bedtime

Treat in lunchbox

Listening to favorite music in car

Watch TV during breakfast

Day off from making bed

Chewing gum

5 min extra Special Time

Weekly:

Bake a special treat

1 hour board game of choice

Invite a friend over

Scavenger hunt

Go out for ice cream

Pick a rental movie

Paint toenails

Go to pet store to see puppies

Allowance

Day off from chores

Special activity with parent

Bubble bath

Big Rewards (ask for your child's input):

Family bowling/mini-golf night

Inexpensive toy

Pick out shirt at Target

Pet goldfish (earn tank, rocks, and plant first)

Having a sleepover

Eating favorite fast food

Pick new book or art supply

Reward Menu

Daily

Reward	Tokens

Medium

Reward	Tokens

Large

Reward	Tokens

TOKEN CHART
Example Brainstorm Form

TARGET BEHAVIOR Clear, concrete, observable language	WHEN CHECKED? When and how will you monitor?	TOKENS
Get out of bed with no more than one reminder	Parent checks after first reminder	1
Come downstairs dressed before timer ends	Upon coming down stairs	1
Put away shoes and backpack after school	Upon entering house	1
Brush teeth and put on pajamas	When child presents ready for bed	1
BONUS: Follow all Behavior Rules all day	When child presents ready for bed	2
	DAILY TOTAL:	**6+ Tokens**

TOKEN CHART

Brainstorm Form

TARGET BEHAVIOR Clear, concrete, observable language	WHEN CHECKED?	TOKENS
BONUS:		
	DAILY TOTAL:	