Good Behavior Game

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In schools today, teachers and administrators can spend up to 50% of their time taking care of issues related to problem behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Dealing with a lot of problem behavior adversely affects teaching and learning (McKenna & Flower, 2014), and takes away from instructional time that is crucial to student achievement. In 2004, The New York nonprofit Public Agenda surveyed teachers and found that 77% of the teachers indicated that teaching would be more effective if time spent on disruptive students was reduced (Dejka, 2013). Disruptive behavior has more negative impacts than just effecting instructional time, these behaviors (e.g., impulsivity, inattention, disruptiveness) are also related to more serious behaviors such as substance abuse and juvenile criminality (Tremblay, Masse, Perron, & Leblanc, 1992).

Furthermore, disruptive behavior is becoming more of a general education teacher's responsibility as more children with significant problem behavior are kept in general education classrooms due to the least restrictive environment (LRE) clause in the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Jacob, Decker, & Hartshorne, 2011). This means that general education teachers need strategies to effectively manage these difficult behaviors in their classroom (McKenna & Flower, 2014). However, many general education teachers are not trained or fully prepared to deal with challenging behavior (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009). This creates the need for easy-to-implement behavior management strategies that can be used by a variety of teachers. Individual behavior management strategies are beneficial; however, it is sometimes difficult for teachers to implement numerous interventions while instructing students. It would be advantageous if the teacher could implement a class-wide behavior management strategy to directly and positively benefit the entire class rather than one individual student (Donaldson, Vollmer, Krous, Downs, & Berard, 2011).

Tier 1 Intervention

One strategy that has received a lot of support and might be a good option for teachers is the Good Behavior Game (GBG). It is easy to implement and provides teachers with an increased ability to spend precious classroom time to instruct academics rather than spending time on student misbehavior. The Good Behavior Game requires minimal training and has been found effective across school settings, making it ideal for busy general education teachers (Flower, McKenna, Bunuan, Muething, & Vega Jr, 2014).
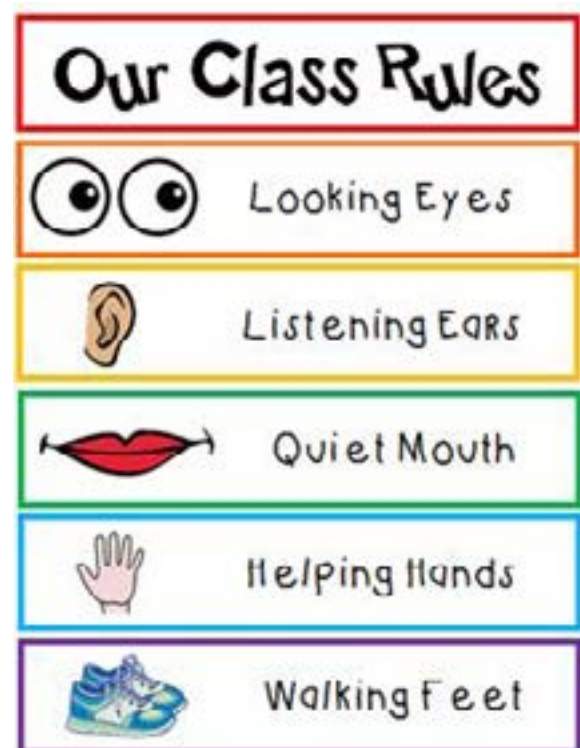
What is the Good Behavior Game?

The Good Behavior Game is a classroom management game that teachers set up during instructional time with their students. Students are divided into teams and compete to be the best behaving team. The best behaving team earns special rewards. In more technical terms, the Good Behavior Game is a class-wide interdependent group contingency strategy, where a group of students can earn a reward contingent on all members of their group meeting specified behavior criteria. Specifically, the Good Behavior Game works by turning instructional time into a game that rewards groups of students for appropriate on-task behaviors. Not only does it provide incentive for the students to behave well, but also, it motivates students to encourage their classmates to behave appropriately as well.

The Good Behavior Game was first developed by Barrish, Saunders, and Wolf in 1969 to investigate the effects of a classroom behavior management technique that consisted of students competing in a game for natural classroom reinforcers or privileges rather than teacher attention. Barrish and colleagues (1969) found significant and reliable reductions in disruptive behavior after the implementation of the game, specifically for out-of-seat and talking-out behavior. Since then, the Good Behavior Game has been regarded as a best practice technique (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010; Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008), and a 'behavioral vaccine' for the multiple significant benefits and positive increases in social behaviors (beyond the original classroom target behaviors) that occur over time with Good Behavior Game implementation (Embry, 2002).

The Good Behavior Game has been used primarily in general education elementary school classrooms to address externalizing behaviors (i.e., disruptive behavior, off-task behavior, out-of-seat behavior, talking out in class, aggression; Flower, McKenna, Bunuan, et al., 2014). However, there is encouraging evidence that the Good Behavior Game is also effective with high school students in special education (Flower, McKenna, Muething, Bryant, & Bryant, 2014) and general education (Kleinman & Saigh, 2011; Mitchell, Tingstrom, Dufrene, Ford, & Sterling, 2015)). Most recently, Mitchell and colleagues (2015) found large effect sizes and significant decreases in disruptive behaviors after implementing the Good Behavior Game in three general education high school classrooms. Additionally, the teachers and most students rated the intervention as acceptable. Helpful modifications for secondary-aged students include referring to the intervention as a "competition" or "teamwork competition", instead of a "good behavior game", and altering reinforcement to be of interest to older students (e.g., homework pass, extra credit, free time, etc.)

The Good Behavior Game is a universal intervention strategy, or Tier 1 intervention, because it addresses all students in the classroom, tackles a broad range of common classroom behavior difficulties, and serves primarily as a preventative strategy. The purpose of the Good Behavior Game is to decrease problem

Building & Sustaining
Student Engagement

behavior in the classroom, help students follow and adapt to school and classroom rules, help students understand consequences that follow inappropriate behavior, and help them understand how their behavior affects the entire classroom; these skills can eventually translate to other settings and help students develop crucial self-regulatory skills (Elswick & Casey, 2011). The game can be implemented at the classroom level, as well as the school-wide level.

How Does it Work?

Although the Good Behavior Game should be adapted to each unique classroom, there are several basic procedures that should always be followed. First, the teacher brainstorms rules and behavior criteria, which typically consist of behaviors that the teacher does not want to see in the classroom. After the teacher explicitly explains and demonstrates the rules to the students, the teacher divides the class into two or more teams. The teacher must make the teams equally likely to win by splitting up potentially disruptive students across teams (Donaldson et al., 2011).

The teacher must remind the teams of the rules, winning criteria (e.g., 3 or less rule violations), and what reward the winning team(s) will receive before every game session (Donaldson et al., 2011). During a Good Behavior Game session, which usually lasts 30 minutes, the teacher continues with typical instruction and does not disrupt the environment by acknowledging problem behavior. Rather, without emotion, the teacher marks a check on the misbehaving team and states what rule was violated (Elswick & Casey, 2011). This step is crucial in order to remove attention for problem behavior and avoid unintentionally reinforcing an attention-seeking student with a reprimand. Additionally, this step is important because acknowledging the inappropriate behavior provides immediate feedback for students so they are explicitly taught what behaviors are considered inappropriate. This allows for the game to be played while taking away very minimal instructional time. Writing check marks on the board and peer disapproval can also serve as a punisher for problem behavior (Donaldson et al., 2011).

The winning team is the team with the fewest checks, but if both teams stay below a specified amount, then both teams can receive the reward (Elswick & Casey, 2011). One study found that the game worked just as well when the students received activity rewards instead of candy (Kosiec, Czernicki, & McLaughlin, 1986). For this reason, it may be advisable to use activity rewards instead of tangible rewards because they are less expensive, parents and educators perceive activities to be more acceptable rewards, and students are less likely to get satiated from activity rewards.

In summary, the Good Behavior Game procedures are used to provide explicit behavior criteria, clearly communicate rules, immediate feedback, positive peer pressure as reinforcement, and group-based differential reinforcement to reduce disruptive behavior class-wide (Rathvon, 2008).

Examples and Variations of GBG

The Good Behavior Game is a flexible strategy that can be modified to accommodate diverse learners, classrooms, and target behaviors. Due to it's flexible nature, the Good Behavior Game has been successfully carried out with different variations. One variation of the Good Behavior Game that research has shown to be effective and that teachers may find useful is to allow students the opportunity to earn points for rule following behavior instead of marking points against them when they engage in problem behavior (Babyak et al., 2000; as cited in McKenna & Flower, 2014). This variation of the Good Behavior Game requires teachers to decide on a set number of points that students need to earn in order to win the Good Behavior Game and receive a reward (McKenna & Flower, 2014).

A second adaptation is to use response-cost in which a teacher provides reinforcement to students who are following directions and takes away reinforcement when students engage in problem behaviors (Tanol et al., 2010; as cited in McKenna & Flower, 2014). Research has demonstrated that using response-cost in the Good Behavior Game has lead to positive outcomes, including better student social skills (Patrick et al., 1998; as cited in McKenna & Flower, 2014).

Other modifications include a self-monitoring component (Babyak, Luze, & Kamps, 2000), not using teams (Harris & Sherman, 1973), using independent and dependent group contingencies rather than the usual interdependent contingency (Gresham & Gresham, 1982), and having students earn points individually (Baybak, 2000). In addition, there is an extension and package version of the Good Behavior Game called PAX. PAX is a program that teaches students self-regulation, self-control, and self-management through a large-scale version of the Good Behavior Game. The package helps individual teachers or whole schools integrate the evidence and strategies behind the Good Behavior Game holistically into their classroom

routines. More information about this version of the Good Behavior Game can be found at http://goodbehaviorgame.org.

Although the Good Behavior Game is easily adaptable, educators must be sure not to alter or take away crucial elements of the game. In an early study, researchers conducted a component analysis of the Good Behavior Game and found that the crucial parts of the game are dividing the class into teams, providing positive consequences or rewards for the winning team, and keeping the winning criteria low (e.g., less than 3 marks or rule violations; Harris & Sherman, 1973). For example, it was found that the use of reward is crucial to the effectiveness of the intervention (Flower et al., 2014). Additional crucial elements include explicit instruction and clear expectations and rules. So while variations of the Good Behavior Game are common, there are important elements that should not be removed.

What Do We Know About the Good Behavior Game?

The Good Behavior Game has a strong research base and is considered an evidenced-based practice. It has been studied for over 45

years and there are over 20 independent replications of the game. In a review of 22 studies, the Good Behavior Game was found to have a moderate to large effect on challenging classroom behavior and other school related behavior (Flower et al., McKenna, Bunuan, Muething, & Vega Jr, 2014). In another review of 21 studies, the overall effect of the Good Behavior Game was considered to be significantly large (*ES* = .82), which resulted in a significant decrease of problem behaviors and an increase of appropriate behaviors (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2015). Furthermore, past studies have shown that the effects on challenging behavior are immediate and significant (Floweret al., 2014). The Good Behavior Game has been found to be easy to implement, require minimal extra effort or preparation from the teacher, be cost and time effective, accessible for all teachers in all countries, and most importantly, it is proven to work well to reduce behavior problems in the classroom (Elswick & Casey, 2011). Specifically, the Good Behavior Game is effective in increasing on-task behavior and reducing disruptive behavior (Lannie & McCurdy, 2007). As well as effectively increasing instructional time by spending less time dealing with problem behavior (Flower et al., 2014).

Bowman-Perrot and colleagues (2015) conducted a moderator analysis and found that students with or at risk of emotional or behavior disorders benefited from the Good Behavior Game significantly more than other students, and students who were disruptive and off-task in the classroom obtained the most benefit from the Good Behavior Game. The Good Be-

havior Game was significantly more effective at reducing these disruptive and off-task behaviors than at increasing attention and on-task behaviors (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2015).

Numerous studies indicate that the Good Behavior Game consistently improves students' disruptive and impulsive behaviors across diverse settings, cultures, socioeconomic groups, grade levels, and countries (Embry, 2002; Nolan, Houlihan, Wanzek, & Jenson, 2014). The Good Behavior Game is based on basic behavioral principles, which makes the game easy to understand and quick for teachers and students to learn. Additionally, the Good Behavior Game is low-cost making it a feasible strategy for all teachers.

The Good Behavior Game does not assume that students understand the behavioral norms or rules of their school. Rather, teachers use the Good Behavior Game to teach students the school and classroom rules by using consistent, explicit, and clear instruction to teach expectations (Dejka, 2013). The Good Behavior Game encourages teachers to adopt various behavior management strategies including acknowledging appropriate behavior, instructing classroom rules, providing feedback after problem behavior, introducing response cost practices, giving verbal praise, and granting rewards as reinforcement for rule following behavior (Flower et al., 2014).

Additionally, the focus of Good Behavior Game on reduction of impulsive classroom behaviors has been found to have long-term effects for the prevention of substance abuse and violent behavior (Embry, 2002). The game is unique because it is one of the only, if not the only, practice that can be implemented by a single teacher and that has documented long-term effects (Embry, 2002).

Conclusions

The Good Behavior Game has 40 years of research and over 20 independent replications, giving it a strong research base. Additionally, it

is found to have immediate and significant effects on challenging behavior (Flower, McKenna, Bunuan, Muething, & Vega Jr, 2014), and the positive effects were replicated across diverse settings, populations, and countries. These significant effects, along with its ease of implementation, low price, and minimal preparation effort, make it a great class-wide behavior strategy that reduces classroom disruptions while safeguarding instructional time. In addition, this is a strategy that can be implemented by a single teacher with evidence for long-term prevention of substance abuse and juvenile delinquency.

Recommended Citation

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