

## Advocating for Student Needs

I have been working with a first grade student for some time now. My work has surrounded building, implementing and continuing to support a behavior plan for this student who has high ability but has a difficult time being at school and staying motivated to complete classwork. The student tended to refuse to do classwork and would experience emotional blowups when they would not receive the same reinforcements and rewards that other classmates received (Bee Tickets, etc.) Typical behaviors included screaming, storming out of the classroom and running away from teachers and staff which was the most concerning behavior due to safety reasons. With his support team (classroom teacher, counselor and special education specialist) we devised a behavior plan that supported his need for regular and more immediate reinforcement. We worked with the student to define behaviors that would fall under “green” behaviors (safe and positive behaviors such as “sitting in seat”, “completing work”, “listening to the teacher’s instructions”, etc.), “yellow” behaviors (borderline unsafe or concerning behaviors such as “ripping up paper”, “not following the teachers instructions”, “yelling”, etc.), and “red” behaviors (unsafe behaviors such as “leaving the classroom”, “throwing things” and “physical aggression towards teacher or classmates”). The student could earn rewards throughout the day by getting points for the types of behaviors they exhibited. Getting all greens meant earning time playing with Legos or playing in the iPad as well as earning a prize from the prize box at the end of the day. Getting all greens or yellows meant that the student did not earn play time but since they chose to use safe behaviors they could choose to stay in for lunch recess (since they preferred to stay inside although this has gradually changed. When they do not earn indoor play time and have the ability to stay in, they choose to go outside for recess.). Getting a mark for any red behavior meant they received no special play time and no prize.

When we first devised this plan, we knew it was extremely important that the messaging about what behaviors awarded which check marks on their plan and consequently which rewards they would earn. The plan was based on creating positive interactions between staff and student where there had been primarily difficult and confrontational interactions. In order to make sure the plan was as successful as possible for this student’s personal and academic growth, it was important that all stakeholders (primary teacher, reading teacher, learning specialist, support staff and parents) were clear on the plan and what behaviors awarded rewards. We wanted to make sure that all people working with the student got the same messaging we gave to the student to be sure all were on the same page.

The plan has been a success so far as the student has aligned with the behavior goals in order to earn their rewards. What lacked to start was an inconsistent message and expectations given to the student from stakeholders. In order to best meet the needs of the student, we had to bring consistency to the student’s support system and that had allowed the student to access their education and gain skills in reaching personal goals.