

The 5 W's of Behavior Contracting



What it is: Behavior contracts are individualized written agreements that are used to change student behavior(s). Contracts should:

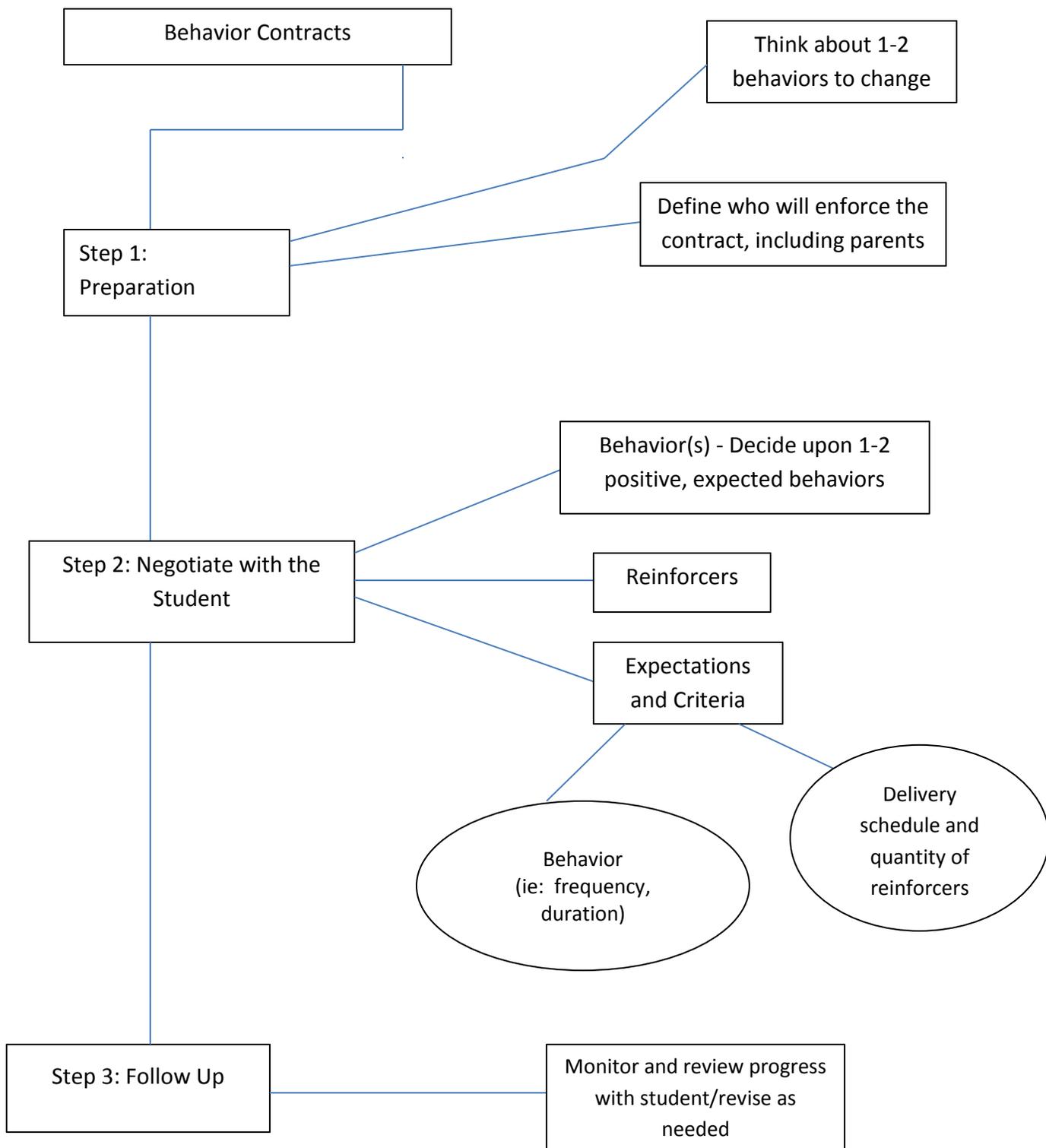
- define student expected positive behaviors
- establish a set of criteria in which to achieve the desired behaviors
- specify reinforcers to motivate the student and increase positive behaviors
- provide a time frame for the contract

Who: Behavior contracts can be beneficial for all students at all grade levels. The contract should be between the teacher, student, and parent, as well as anyone else who may be enforcing the plan. For instance, multiple teachers may be included at the secondary level. Parents also play an important role as they can provide additional motivation and reinforcement at home for positive behaviors displayed at school. This also lets the student know that school and home are working together as a team.

When: Behavior contracts are a tier 2 intervention and should be considered when tier 1 strategies have not been effective in creating positive change and problem behaviors continue to persist. Contracts may be implemented in order to increase any number of expected behaviors such as work completion or raising hand instead of calling out.

Why: Behavior contracts create greater student buy-in when he or she is able to help develop the contract, set goals, and give input into the reinforcement system. Behavior contracts:

- set limits
- provide accountability to the student
- focus on positive behaviors
- build positive relationships between the student and teachers
- reward and motivate the student



How to develop the behavior contract:

Step 1: Preparation

1. Determine who will be responsible for enforcing the behavior contract (ie: teachers, parents) and include them when meeting with the student.
2. Have 1-2 behaviors in mind that you want to see changed prior to meeting with the student.

Step 2: Negotiate with the student

1. Behaviors
 - a. Decide which behavior(s) you want to see changed and which expected behavior(s) you want to see in its place. Focus on 1-2 behaviors only.
 - b. Define the positive, expected behavior(s) so that it is easy to see and identify. For example, use “raises hand and waits to be called on before speaking” instead of “stop talking.”
2. Reinforcers
 - a. Find out what motivates the student. Rewards should be meaningful and something the student wants to work towards. This may include small items such as stickers or tokens that are traded in for larger items. In addition to tangibles, consider preferred activities such as computer time or lunch with a favorite adult (see sample of reinforcers below). Regardless of the reinforcer(s), they should be motivating, easy to deliver, and inexpensive.
 - b. Have a variety of reinforcers from which to choose. Some students get tired of a particular reward quickly and require a different motivator, often weekly.
3. Expectations and Criteria
 - a. Behavior(s)

When determining the criteria for the expected behaviors, encourage the student to set realistic expectations rather than those that are too high or unrealistic. It might be helpful to break down goals into smaller more manageable steps to ensure student success.

Consider frequency and duration of the expected behavior(s). Discuss and negotiate:

 - *How often should the student engage in the positive, expected behaviors in order to earn the reinforcer? 5 times per hour? 5 times per day?*
 - *How long should the student engage in the behavior? If the goal is to stay seated, will it be for 5 minutes, 10 minutes, or 30 minutes at a time?*

b. Delivery schedule and quantity of reinforcers

- i. Determine when and how often to provide the reinforcers. Consider time of day (end of day, end of the period or subject area), weekly, or hourly. Very young or unmotivated students may be more responsive to frequent delivery of reinforcement such as hourly or at the end of a specific subject period. If using a token system, think about how often tokens can be traded in for the reinforcer. Generally, schedules of reinforcement longer than 2 weeks will not be as effective as the payoff needs to be more immediate.
- ii. Decide on the amount of reinforcement. For example, will the student need to earn 5 stickers before earning a preferred item/activity? Are 10 stickers required daily for 5 days before earning lunch with a favorite adult? When establishing criteria, use cumulative rather than consecutive days. Consider the following example in which the student may earn lunch with a favorite adult after earning 10 stickers over 5 cumulative days.

Monday: 10 stickers

Tuesday: 10 stickers

Wednesday: 10 stickers

Thursday: 7 stickers

Friday: 10 stickers

Monday: 10 stickers

In the example above, even though the student did not reach the goal of 10 stickers on Thursday, the overall criteria for earning lunch was still met as 10 stickers were earned on the subsequent Friday and Monday. However, if 5 consecutive days had been utilized instead, the student would have had to start all over again on Friday to work towards earning lunch. This negates the successes from Monday through Wednesday. Using cumulative days ensures greater success and continued motivation on the part of the student.

Step 3: Follow-up and progress monitoring

1. How do you monitor the progress towards the set criteria? For example, will tallies be marked on a note card taped to the student's desk or will a checklist be kept by the teacher? Keep it simple.
2. How often is data collected? It may not be necessary to collect data throughout the day but rather during certain time periods such as after lunch or during one specific subject/class period. When you decide to collect the data will be dependent upon the criteria established in the step 2.
3. Be positive! When reviewing progress with the student, start with what is working. Talk about what improvements have been made before discussing what may need to be revised or worked on.
4. Remember this is a team process that requires buy-in on the part of the student. Check in with the student to see how the contract is working. Let the student know that it can be renegotiated and changed at any time. Insert a clause into the contract that states that the student may opt out at any time if he or she does not want to continue with it.

Remember: This is a contract which means signatures are an essential component. Ensure that the student, parent and all other parties enforcing the contract sign the completed document.



Behavior contracts sound great, but what if...



Q: The student seems confused or never starts. Now what?

A: The expected behavior(s) may not be clearly defined or explained. The expectation may also be overwhelming for the student. Consider reducing the requirement to more manageable levels and gradually increasing criteria. Model and role play expected behavior(s).

Q: The student is unwilling to participate. How do I make them participate in the process?

A: The development of a behavior contract is a collaborative effort between the student and those who will be enforcing it, which includes the parents. Emphasize to the student the desire to negotiate and that their input is invaluable to the process. In fact, it cannot happen without them! Consider bringing in

an adult who has a strong rapport or connection with the student to be part of the contract development.

Q: The student started out excited but now just seems frustrated. Why isn't the contract working?

A: It may be that the criterion is too high or the behavior(s) chosen are too difficult. Renegotiate and consider breaking down the goals into more manageable sections.

Q: The student started out working hard at first, but now seems to lack motivation. What do I do?

A: Ensure that the reinforcers are still motivating. It may be that the student needs a variety of rewards to choose from. Make sure that reinforcers are delivered consistently according to the criteria set and that delivery is frequent enough.

Q: The student no longer wants to have a behavior contract. Now what?

A: If the student no longer wants to participate then allow the student to opt out. Behavior contracts require a team approach and are a collaborative process. They cannot be reinforced without buy-in from everyone.

Additional links/resources :

worksheetplace.com

k6educators.about.com

Per: The Tough Kid Book, pg 102-105: