

Response Cost

Use This When:
 In conjunction with rewards, to decrease the likelihood of undesirable behavior.



Objectives:

- to provide the caregiver with a convenient, systematic, immediate, and powerful consequence for misbehavior

Steps:

❑ Provide rationale	Response cost serves as a penalty for unacceptable behavior and is almost always applied within the context of a reward system, particularly a token economy system.
❑ Review reward system	<p>Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific behaviors to increase (e.g., chore compliance, prosocial behavior towards sibling), • rewards (e.g., 1 chip for taking out the trash, 3 chips for sharing toys with sibling), and • cost of rewards (e.g., time spent riding bike = 4 tokens).
❑ Identification of target behaviors: Be specific	Be specific about the exact behavior that will result in penalties. This sets up clear expectations for the child and allows the caregiver to easily identify when the behavior has occurred. For example, “Hitting sibling” is more specific than is “Being bad.”
❑ Identification of target behaviors: Pick a manageable number of behaviors	<p>Choose a manageable number of behaviors to penalize. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>frequency of behaviors</i>: the more frequent the behavior, the more caregiver attention and monitoring will need to occur, and • <i>child’s developmental stage</i>: younger children or children with developmental delays will require simpler penalty programs with fewer target behaviors than will older children.
❑ Penalties: Magnitude	Just as values were determined for the rewards for positive behaviors, values are assigned to each undesirable behavior, with more severe behaviors resulting in greater token penalties. Penalties for undesirable behavior should be comparable to what the desired behavior would have earned for a reward (e.g., refusing to take out the trash = 1 chip deduction; not sharing toys = 3 chips deduction). A visual reminder of the system (e.g., chart) may be helpful for caregivers and children.
❑ Penalties: Immediately after the behavior	Penalties should be implemented immediately following the target behavior in order to teach the child about the link between inappropriate behavior and its consequences.
❑ Penalties: Contingent on behavior	Penalties should be contingent on target behavior, meaning implemented ONLY after the occurrence of the target behavior and not for other undesirable behavior.

Steps:

- **Anticipate difficulties**
 - *Child repeatedly responds to the penalty with unacceptable behavior for which he or she is fined.* Repeated fines for the child's unacceptable behavior in response to fines may escalate the child's behavior to the point that he or she loses so many tokens that the child becomes unmotivated to participate in the reward system. Suggest that the caregiver fine the child one time and use an alternate punishment (e.g., time out, privilege removal) if the child exhibits unacceptable behavior in response to the fine.
 - *Child earns so many tokens that he/she has access to rewards despite frequent unacceptable behavior.* The child has likely mastered the level of appropriate behavior indicated by the caregiver, so increase the difficulty of behaviors required to earn the same number of tokens. Additionally, adding the rule that the child must spend a certain proportion of tokens each day prevents the child from cashing them in on days when undesirable behavior occurs frequently. Similarly, consider making a rule that the child cannot earn a particularly desirable reward on days in which penalties exceed a certain amount (e.g., no video game on days when child hits sibling more than once).
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Helpful Tips:

- Remember to praise often
- Remember to review often, by **asking questions**
- Remember to use examples to explain concepts
- Remember to practice often and provide corrective feedback to the caregiver
- Brief any other caregivers, teachers, or other adult figures who may be involved
- Simplify these steps if you have to
- This material can be covered in more than one session/meeting