

Good Behavior Game

Authored by
mohammad looti

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Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Applied Behavior Analysis, Educational Psychology, School Psychology

1. Core Definition and Foundational Purpose

The **Good Behavior Game** (GBG) is an evidence-based, classroom-wide behavioral management intervention designed to foster appropriate conduct and create a conducive learning environment for all students. Rooted in principles of applied behavior analysis, it employs a group-oriented contingency system to reinforce positive behaviors and systematically reduce disruptive actions within the educational setting. The GBG provides a structured, proactive framework through which teachers can manage classroom dynamics effectively, moving beyond reactive disciplinary measures to cultivate a culture of self-regulation and mutual respect among pupils.

At its core, the GBG specifically targets and rewards a range of desirable behaviors that are fundamental to classroom functioning and social development. These include, but are not limited to, adhering to instructions, demonstrating good manners, taking turns, staying on task, and working cooperatively. By explicitly defining these appropriate behaviors and linking them to tangible or intangible rewards, the game provides clear expectations and motivates students to internalize and consistently display conduct that supports both their own learning and the collective educational experience of their peers.

Recognized for its robust empirical support, the GBG has demonstrated significant efficacy in addressing prevalent classroom challenges such as aggression, off-task behavior, and other unhealthy or disruptive habits. Its systematic approach not only curtails negative behaviors but also concurrently promotes the acquisition of pro-social skills. The intervention's effectiveness is largely attributed to its strategic use of positive reinforcement and peer influence, making it a powerful tool for enhancing academic engagement and cultivating a more orderly, productive, and psychologically safe educational atmosphere.

2. Historical Trajectory and Theoretical Underpinnings

The genesis of the Good Behavior Game dates back to the late 1960s, a period marked by burgeoning research in applied behavior analysis. It was originally developed by Montrose M. Wolf, David M. Barrish, and Robert R. Saunders in 1969 at the Kansas Boys Industrial School. Their pioneering work sought to address severe disruptive behaviors prevalent in institutional settings through a structured, group-based intervention. The initial formulation of the GBG laid the groundwork for a scalable and effective classroom management strategy that could be broadly applied to improve student conduct and facilitate learning.

Following its initial development, the GBG underwent considerable refinement and validation, transitioning from an institutional context to widespread adoption in general education classrooms. Its underlying principles, firmly rooted in **operant conditioning**, proved highly adaptable to diverse educational environments and student populations. Over the subsequent decades, numerous research studies have affirmed and expanded upon the original findings, demonstrating the game's consistent effectiveness across different grade levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts, thereby solidifying its status as an empirically supported intervention.

The theoretical foundation of the Good Behavior Game rests primarily on B.F. Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, which posits that behaviors are learned and maintained through their consequences. Within the GBG framework, desired behaviors are strengthened through **positive reinforcement**, where students receive rewards for meeting behavioral criteria. Conversely, disruptive behaviors are discouraged by preventing access to rewards or through mild forms of response cost (e.g., losing a point). This systematic application of consequences shapes individual and group behavior over time.

Furthermore, the GBG leverages principles of **social learning theory** and **group contingencies**. By dividing the class into teams, the intervention harnesses the power of peer influence and positive peer pressure. Students are motivated to encourage appropriate behavior in their teammates, as the success of the group hinges on the collective adherence to rules. This interdependence fosters a sense of shared responsibility and promotes the development of self-monitoring and prosocial skills, making it a comprehensive approach to behavioral change that extends beyond mere individual reinforcement.

3. Systematic Implementation: A Procedural Framework

Successful implementation of the Good Behavior Game necessitates a systematic and well-structured approach, with the teacher playing a pivotal role in its preparation, clear instruction, and consistent execution. Fidelity to the intervention model is crucial to achieving desired behavioral outcomes, requiring teachers to carefully plan each phase and communicate expectations transparently. This structured process ensures that all students understand the rules, consequences, and rewards, thereby maximizing engagement and the potential for behavioral improvement.

The initial and critical planning phase involves the teacher meticulously deciding on the **schedule of the game**. This entails specifying the particular periods or activities during the class day when the GBG will be actively played. Teachers typically select times when appropriate behavior is most critical or when disruptions are historically more frequent, such as during independent seat work, math activities, silent reading, or group projects. Strategic scheduling ensures the intervention targets periods prone to behavioral challenges, maximizing its impact on maintaining focus and

order.

Following the scheduling decision, teachers must strategically **decide on suitable rewards** that genuinely motivate their specific student population. The effectiveness of the game is heavily contingent upon the perceived value and desirability of these reinforcements. Rewards can vary widely, encompassing privileges such as being the first to leave for lunch or recess, extra free time, special classroom responsibilities, or small tangible items. The process often involves surveying students to identify their preferred rewards, ensuring they are age-appropriate, equitable, and sustainable over time.

A crucial step before commencing play is to comprehensively **introduce the game** to the class. The teacher presents all the details, clarifying the objectives, explaining the specific rules of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, detailing the reward system, and outlining how teams will function. This introductory session is vital for addressing all student queries, ensuring complete understanding of expectations. Following this, the class is divided into two or more small, heterogeneous teams, designed to balance behavioral challenges and strengths across groups, fostering collective effort and mutual support.

Once introduced, the teacher proceeds with the **execution of the game** during the designated periods. While lessons continue as usual, the significant difference is the public recording of student behaviors. The teacher monitors each team, awarding marks (e.g., tally marks on a whiteboard or chart) for instances of rule infractions. This public tracking provides immediate visual feedback to students, prompting self-monitoring and behavioral adjustments. At the end of the game period, teams that accumulate fewer marks than a pre-determined criterion, or the team(s) with the fewest marks, receive the agreed-upon reward, reinforcing their success and motivating continued adherence to the rules.

4. Demonstrated Effectiveness and Broad Significance

The Good Behavior Game boasts a robust and extensive evidence base, firmly establishing it as one of the most effective and widely researched behavioral interventions in educational settings. Numerous meta-analyses and longitudinal studies have consistently affirmed its efficacy in improving classroom conduct and fostering a positive learning climate. This strong empirical support underscores its reliability as a practical tool for educators seeking to manage classroom behavior and enhance student outcomes.

Specifically, the GBG has been shown to produce significant reductions across a spectrum of disruptive behaviors, including but not limited to, off-task behavior, aggression, non-compliance, and verbal outbursts. By systematically reinforcing appropriate conduct and minimizing opportunities for misbehavior, the game helps to cultivate a more orderly, respectful, and conducive learning environment. These improvements in behavior often translate into enhanced

academic engagement, reduced instructional time lost to discipline, and ultimately, improved academic achievement for students.

Beyond its direct impact on behavior, the GBG is also celebrated for its cost-effectiveness and relative ease of implementation, especially when compared to more individualized and intensive behavioral interventions. Its group-oriented nature allows a single teacher to manage the behavior of an entire class efficiently. Furthermore, its preventative design helps to address minor behavioral issues before they escalate, thereby reducing the need for more intensive disciplinary actions and contributing to a more proactive rather than reactive approach to classroom management. Its versatility has also led to its integration into broader school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) frameworks.

5. Considerations and Potential Challenges

While the Good Behavior Game is widely lauded for its effectiveness, it is not without potential considerations and criticisms that warrant careful attention from educators. One primary concern revolves around the potential for **extrinsic motivation** to overshadow or diminish intrinsic motivation. Critics argue that an over-reliance on external rewards might reduce students' inherent desire to behave appropriately or engage in learning for its own sake, potentially leading to a dependence on tangible incentives rather than an internalization of positive behavioral norms.

Another area of debate concerns the possibility of **unintended consequences** related to the group contingency aspect. For instance, some students might become overly competitive, leading to increased anxiety or negative peer interactions. Conversely, less motivated students within a team might disengage if they perceive their team has little chance of winning, potentially leading to feelings of alienation or ostracization from their peers who are more invested in the reward. Managing peer pressure effectively is crucial to mitigate scenarios where teams might unfairly target or blame members perceived as hindering their collective success.

Maintaining the long-term effects and ensuring the generalization of learned behaviors to non-game contexts present additional challenges. While effective during active play, behaviors might revert once the game or its associated rewards are discontinued. Therefore, educators must strategically plan for the gradual fading of rewards and implement strategies to promote the transfer of positive behaviors to other settings and times. This often involves integrating the GBG within a broader positive behavior support system and explicitly teaching self-management skills.

Finally, while highly effective for managing typical classroom behaviors, the Good Behavior Game may not sufficiently address the intensive behavioral needs of all students, particularly those with severe emotional and behavioral disorders. These students often require more individualized, function-based assessments and tailored interventions. While the GBG can be a component of a comprehensive support plan, it is generally considered a Tier 1 or Tier 2 intervention within a multi-

tiered system of support and may need to be supplemented with more targeted strategies for students with complex needs.

6. Adaptations, Variations, and Contemporary Relevance

The core principles of the Good Behavior Game have proven remarkably adaptable, leading to numerous variations and modifications tailored for diverse student populations and educational contexts. These adaptations include adjustments to rules, reward systems, and implementation strategies to suit different developmental levels, from early childhood education to adolescent classrooms, and even for students with specific learning or behavioral disabilities. Such flexibility has broadened its applicability and enhanced its utility across the educational spectrum, making it a versatile tool for educators.

Furthermore, the GBG's robust framework has facilitated its seamless integration into broader school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) initiatives. Within a multi-tiered system of support, the GBG often functions as a universal (Tier 1) intervention, promoting positive behavior for all students, or as a targeted (Tier 2) intervention for small groups requiring additional support. Its ability to complement other preventative and responsive strategies underscores its importance in creating a consistent and positive behavioral climate throughout an entire school, reinforcing common expectations and values.

Contemporary research continues to explore and refine the application of the Good Behavior Game, including investigations into digital adaptations, its efficacy in remote learning environments, and studies focusing on optimal implementation parameters for culturally and socioeconomically diverse student populations. These ongoing efforts aim to further enhance the game's accessibility, effectiveness, and relevance in an evolving educational landscape, ensuring its continued role as a foundational, evidence-based strategy for promoting positive behavior and fostering optimal learning conditions.

Further Reading

[Good Behavior Game - Wikipedia](#)

[Good Behavior Game - OJJDP Model Programs Guide](#)

[The Good Behavior Game: A Meta-Analysis of Studies Published From 1969 to 2015 - PBIS](#)

[The Good Behavior Game Manual - University of Nevada, Reno](#)

[Behavioral Psychology - American Psychological Association](#)