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Responding to rule violations or rule following: A comparison of two versions of the Good Behavior Game with kindergarten students[☆]

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the differential effects of 2 versions of the Good Behavior Game (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969), allocating teacher attention to rule violations (GBG-response cost) and to rule following (GBG-reinforcement), on student and teacher behavior. The participants were 6 kindergarten students who were nominated as the 3 most disruptive students in each classroom. The study was conducted using single-case A/B/A/C/B/C reversal design with each teacher randomly assigned to either GBG-response cost or GBG-reinforcement condition for implementation in the first B phase. Results indicated that both versions were effective at reducing rule violations and that GBG-reinforcement consistently resulted in either comparable or lower levels of rule violations across classrooms and students. In addition, GBG-reinforcement was preferred by the teachers as a better fit to their classrooms. The implications of the findings to teachers and school psychologists in classroom settings are discussed.

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Educators report that 16% to 30% of young students experience social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties in the classroom (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Over time, these difficulties contribute to the development of problem behaviors such as disruption and

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noncompliance, which inhibit the academic and social skills needed for learning (Austin & Agar, 2005; O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2003). Research suggests that students who have difficulty following directions and attending to instructions at an early age are less likely to engage in positive interactions with their teachers and more likely to experience academic difficulties and peer-relations problems later in their development (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Colemand, 1997; Shores & Wehby, 1999). Therefore, preventing problem behavior at an early age when the effects of treatment may have greater cumulative impact is important in order to minimize long-term difficulties (Snyder, 2001; Tremblay, Mass, Pagani, & Vitaro, 1996; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004).

Kindergarten is an important milestone for children because introduction to formal schooling accompanies an increased focus on social and academic skills. Thus, kindergarten can be a particularly difficult transition (Perry & Weinstein, 1998; Stormont, Beckner, Mitchell, & Richter, 2005). In most instances students experiencing behavioral difficulties do not receive enough educational support to enable their adaptation during this phase (Stormont et al., 2005; Webster-Stratton, 1997). Accordingly, it is crucial to implement preventative strategies at this stage to facilitate future success.

There are various classroom management strategies that are well-proven to be effective in preventing and reducing problem behavior (e.g., noncompliance), whether implemented as a universal procedure for the classroom or for individual students who require targeted intervention. These strategies include differential reinforcement (Gunter & Coutinho, 1997; Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 1968), response cost (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Witt & Elliott, 1982), token economies (Boniecki & Moore, 2003; Kazdin, 1982; O'Leary & Becker, 1967) and group-oriented contingencies (Litoe & Pumroy, 1975; Theodore, Bray, & Kehle, 2004). Moreover, tiered prevention models, such as positive behavioral intervention and support (see Sugai & Horner, 2008), have been developed to improve the range of available instruments for teachers to more effectively address problem behavior at an early stage. Although each of these strategies has proven to be effective under specific circumstances, adoption and sustained use has not been consistent or widespread (Kazdin, 2000; Rotheram-Borus & Duan, 2003; Sugai & Horner, 2008).

Recent studies that have examined use of the Good Behavior Game (GBG; Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969) as a classroom-level approach to behavior management (e.g., Lannie & McCurdy, 2007; McCurdy, Lannie, & Barnabas, 2009) have indicated that it may have great promise for addressing problem behavior at early stages. The GBG is an interdependent group-oriented contingency in which teachers offer systematic responses to a pre-specified set of rules that result in some form of visual consequence (e.g., a mark on the board) for the team. An interdependent group-oriented contingency involves an entire group (e.g., teams or a whole class) earning or losing a reinforcer contingent on the behavior of each individual in the group (Litoe & Pumroy, 1975; Skinner, Cashwell, & Dunn, 1996). At the end of the scheduled period playing the GBG, groups of students either gain or lose reinforcers depending on compliance with the rules of the game. A number of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of GBG for decreasing noncompliance (Tingstrom, Sterling-Turner, & Wilczynski, 2006). Barrish et al. (1969) first introduced the GBG as a procedure for managing disruptive behavior. Their findings were initially replicated and extended in studies targeting talking out and out-of-seat behaviors (Harris & Sherman, 1973; Medland & Stachnik, 1972). More recently, it has been shown to be

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