



# JONAH: A Positive Behavior Strategy

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

## Module 5: Building Skills that Lead to New Actions

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*“Habit is a cable; we weave a thread of it each day,  
and at last we cannot break it.”*

*--Horace Mann (1796-1859)*

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### JONAH: A Positive Behavior Strategy

The JONAH framework continues to guide our work, drawing wisdom from the story of Jonah. It reminds educators and students alike that growth comes through Just Opportunities, New Actions, and Hope. Each of these principles is grounded in grace, accountability, and the belief that every learner can change and flourish with the right support.

- **Just Opportunities.** Creating fair and supportive conditions for learning, where accountability and second chances build trust.
- **New Actions.** Teaching and practicing positive behaviors that replace old patterns through structure, modeling, and encouragement.
- **Hope.** Believing in the capacity of every student, and every teacher, to grow through grace, perseverance, and community support.

In Module 4, we explored emotional regulation and the ways stress, trauma, and environment influence behavior. We focused on helping students build coping skills and emotional awareness so they can respond to challenges with calm and confidence.

Module 5 continues this focus on *New Actions* for both students and educators. Change begins when individuals, students and adults alike, practice new ways of thinking, speaking, and responding. This module will explore how teachers can model positive communication, teach replacement behaviors, and create classroom systems that reinforce success. It will also highlight how declarative language, structured choices, and supportive responses can guide students toward self-control and independence.

In the spirit of the JONAH strategy, *New Actions* are more than behavior management, they are opportunities for productive change. Each new response, whether from a teacher or a student, moves the classroom closer to becoming a community shaped by respect, compassion, and hope.



New habits are like a strong cable.

Image: McBublo, C. H. (2019, May 31). *Tied ropes on blur green background*. Pexels.com (CC free to use)

## Giving Instructions

Small shifts in communication can make a significant difference in how students respond. Obviously, when giving directions, clarity and respect are key; however, because verbal instructions are short-lived, it is also helpful to provide visual or written cues that students can reference as needed. Short, positive, direct instructions tend to work best when there is only one correct way to complete a task. In addition, immediate recognition and encouragement will serve to reinforce desired behaviors. Unfortunately, not all students respond well to direct commands, particularly those who highly value independence or have experienced negative interactions with authority figures. For these students, **declarative language** can be a more effective approach. Instead of giving a directive, the teacher shares information or observations with the intention of helping students decide

what to do next. For example, saying *“It looks like it’s almost time to line up”* rather than *“Line up now”* allows students to pause, reflect, and take ownership of their actions.

Declarative language guides attention and promotes independent thinking. Rather than issuing commands, it shares perspective and context, creating a collaborative tone rather than a controlling one. Research indicates that this approach can reduce resistance because it feels natural and respectful. It also supports the development of important social-cognitive skills, such as interpreting cues, considering others’ perspectives, and linking actions to outcomes.

When a student appears uncertain, declarative language can build confidence: *“I see that you’re working to solve a difficult problem; this reminds me of the last time you solved a tough problem.”* Such statements encourage initiative and self-reflection without pressure.

Declarative statements tend to sound conversational and reflective:

- *“I was hoping…”*
- *“I wonder…”*
- *“I notice…”*

Even simple comments like *“It’s colder than expected today”* or *“You look ready to go”* can help maintain connection and model awareness. This type of language communicates trust in students’ ability to think, choose, and act responsibly.

Modeling out loud one’s own thinking is another way to demonstrate problem-solving in action. For instance, a teacher might say, *“When I can’t remember where I put something, it helps to imagine myself walking through my day. I start at the beginning and retrace my steps in my mind, like replaying a movie.”* This kind of self-talk shows students how to approach challenges calmly and thoughtfully.

When offering choices, it is important to provide options that are both genuine and balanced. Catastrophic choices and sarcastic comments such as *“You can choose to put on your coat or you can choose to freeze,”* can undermine trust, particularly for students

who often feel powerless. However, authentic choices within safe and appropriate boundaries can help promote autonomy while maintaining structure.

Teachers should not assume that students will always act in ways that promote self-preservation during times when they are feeling stressed. Under emotional strain, reasoning and safety instincts often shut down. In these moments, experiencing a “natural consequence” rarely leads to learning. Instead, these experiences serve only to increase distress or confusion. The teacher’s role at these times is to ensure safety and help the student return to a regulated state before reflection or problem-solving can occur.

Finally, intimidation or threats should never be used to gain compliance. When students feel cornered, they may exhibit “fight, flight, or freeze” responses, not out of defiance, but as a form of self-protection. Behaviors such as avoiding eye contact, turning away, or offering a quick apology may reflect an attempt to de-escalate rather than a show of disrespect. A calm presence, non-threatening tone of voice, and consistent empathy communicate safety and trust which are the foundation of effective behavior support that promotes emotional growth ([Bowler, 2022](#); [Kern et al., 2016](#); [Minahan & Rappaport, 2018](#)).

Declarative Sentences:	Interrogative Sentences:	Imperative Sentences:	Exclamatory Sentences:
.	?	.	!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* ends with a period (.)</li> <li>* Tells or gives information</li> </ul> <p><u>"Telling Sentence"</u></p> <p>Example: I like to read good books.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* ends with a question mark (?)</li> <li>* Asks a question</li> </ul> <p><u>"Questioning Sentence"</u></p> <p>Example: Are you reading a good book?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* ends with a period (.)</li> <li>* Gives orders or a command</li> </ul> <p><u>"Commanding Sentence"</u></p> <p>Example: Go get my book. Please go get my book.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* ends with an exclamation point (!)</li> <li>* Shows excitement or feeling.</li> </ul> <p><u>"Exciting Sentence"</u></p> <p>Example: I love this book!</p>

Use declarative sentences when giving instructions.

Image: Baxter, J. (2007, August 23). *Types of sentences flip book*. Flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

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### Case Study: Using Declarative Language to Support Emotional Regulation

Student: *Liam, 6th grade*

Liam was bright and creative but often shut down when corrected or redirected. Traditional commands (“Get started now,” “Stop arguing”) only made things worse. He’d cross his arms, put his head down, and refuse to participate. His teacher began practicing declarative language, focusing on calm observations and shared problem-solving. Instead of saying, “You need to open your book,” she tried, “It looks like you’re not ready to start yet. Let me know what would help.” When Liam became frustrated, she’d comment gently, “I can see this is hard for you right now. Maybe you could take a quick break, get a drink of water, and then come back and try again.”

Over time, Liam began using similar language himself: “I need a second,” or “I’m not ready yet.” He learned to name his feelings and choose short breaks when he began to feel dysregulated. There was a noticeable decrease in instances when his behavior escalated enough to interfere with learning.

**Key Idea:** Declarative language models self-regulation and problem solving and helps build emotional safety. By reducing power struggles and shifting from control to collaboration. It encourages students to think, reflect, and choose positive actions.

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## Building Positive Relationships

A powerful way to build positive relationships with students, especially those who present challenges, is to intentionally notice at least one quality to like and admire in each of them. Even when a student’s behavior feels difficult, the traits that cause frustration could be undeveloped strengths in disguise. Persistence, creativity, sensitivity, and courage can all appear as disruptive or challenging behaviors before they are refined. When confronted with a student’s defiant or hurtful words, it can help to pause and remember that

determination and self-expression, when guided effectively, can become valuable assets rather than obstacles.

Equally important is the teacher's awareness of their own emotional reactions. Teaching is deeply personal work, and it is natural to want students to respond positively to lessons and guidance. However, when that does not happen, perhaps directions are ignored or resistance surfaces, it can feel discouraging. Often, strong emotional responses are connected to a person's core values: those who value respect may feel hurt by rudeness, while those who value belonging may struggle with rejection. Recognizing these emotional triggers allows teachers to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

Before giving directives, it is often helpful to connect first. A brief check-in can prevent conflict, particularly when compliance may be difficult. For example, saying, "*I'm thinking of asking you to... How does that sound?*" gives students a voice and reduces the likelihood of refusal. This type of collaborative approach can turn potential power struggles into cooperative problem-solving. For students who enjoy verbal engagement, channeling that energy into structured debates or role plays allows them to express themselves productively while building social and academic skills.

Another effective strategy is to provide ways for students to meet their needs appropriately without breaking the rules. When students cannot access what they need when they need it, perhaps attention or a chance to move around or take a break, they may escalate. This can turn a minor frustration into an episode of defiance or withdrawal. Providing access to structured break passes and similar flexible options supports students to self-regulate while maintaining accountability. Note that sharing clear guidelines about when and how these supports may be used is important and promotes both responsibility and trust.

Acknowledging mistakes is another powerful teaching tool. Many students who struggle with behavior also find it difficult to admit errors or accept feedback. When teachers model humility by taking responsibility for their mistakes calmly and respectfully, integrity and emotional maturity are demonstrated. A lighthearted challenge, such as inviting students to "catch the teacher's mistake," can make this even more engaging and help build rapport.

Students enjoy the chance to take the teacher's role and providing them with this type of opportunity strengthens attention and participation.

Humor, surprise, and storytelling can also strengthen student-teacher relationships and make learning more memorable. When used thoughtfully, humor diffuses tension and fosters positive emotion, though it should always be used in ways that are sensitive to differences in students' backgrounds and perspectives. Sharing short, personal stories, especially about overcoming challenges or learning through mistakes, is another way to help students see teachers as authentic and approachable role models.

Finally, as noted in Module 1, an important component of teaching behavioral expectations includes explicitly teaching the expected behavior. That means that instead of focusing on what students should not do, teachers should explicitly model and reinforce the desired behavior. Every behavioral expectation can be treated as a skill to be taught, practiced, and strengthened through feedback. A practical guideline is to teach expected behaviors as if training a new employee to perform those behaviors. Using role-play, guided practice, and even role reversal helps students translate understanding into action and builds confidence in their ability to make positive choices ([Bowler, 2022](#); [Kern et al., 2016](#); [Minahan & Rappaport, 2018](#); [Partington & Partington, 2018](#)).

### Strategy for Building Positive Relationships with Students



The 2x10 strategy is a relationship-building technique for teachers who talk with a specific student for two minutes each day for ten consecutive school days  
Image: Ver Velde, J. (2025, September 30). *Education: DSC7182*. Dordt University.

The 2x10 Strategy is a simple relationship-building approach that is particularly effective for building relationships with students who are struggling behaviorally or who seem disconnected. The idea is to spend 2 minutes a day for 10 consecutive school days having a positive, personal conversation with the student about anything *not* related to schoolwork or behavior. The goal is to build trust and connection through genuine interest and consistency.

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#### *Case Study: 2X10 Strategy*

Ms. Lantinga noticed that one of her students, Isaac, had been acting out and avoiding work. She decided to try the 2x10 strategy. Each morning for the next two weeks, she made sure to chat with Isaac for two minutes before class started. They talked about basketball, video games, and Isaac's dog. By the end of the 10 days, Isaac was more talkative, smiled when he came into class, and began responding more positively to redirection.

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## Tier 2 Supports for Teaching New Actions

For some students, learning **New Actions** requires more intentional structure and support. These students benefit from Tier 2 interventions. Tier 2 supports are targeted strategies that provide extra guidance without removing students from the general classroom. Tier 2 interventions focus on teaching and reinforcing positive behavior through clear expectations, consistent feedback, and meaningful motivation. Simple tools like timers and planned breaks can help students regulate attention and emotions before frustration builds. Strategies such as token economies help increase motivation by connecting effort with reinforcement, while visual schedules make routines predictable and reduce anxiety. Check-in/check-out systems can strengthen relationships, increase opportunities for feedback, and promote accountability, while self-monitoring encourages ownership of behavior. These supports are not punishments or quick fixes. Instead, they are proactive teaching tools that help students practice the self-management skills needed for long-term

success ([Crone et al., 2004](#); [IRIS Center, 2022](#); [Kern et al., 2016](#); [Minahan & Rappaport, 2018](#); [Partington & Partington, 2018](#)).

## Timers, Breaks, and Visual Schedules

Supporting students' attention, self-regulation, and independence often begins with structure. Tools like timers, breaks, and visual schedules help make classroom expectations more predictable and manageable. They reduce anxiety, make expectations clear, and increase students' confidence in navigating their day.

### *Timers: Building Focus and Predictability*



Students learn to manage time by seeing how much time remains for a task.  
Image: Hawley, S. (2025, November 19). *Timer*. Dordt University. (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Timers give students a clear sense of how long an activity will last and when to shift attention. For many students, especially those with ADHD, anxiety, or executive functioning challenges, time can feel abstract or unpredictable. A timer that provides a visible countdown can help them understand the expectation and stay engaged.

How to use timers effectively:

- Preview the task and time limit. Say, “We are going to work on this part for five minutes. I’ll start the timer now.”
- Use timers that include a visual display, such as a sand timer, digital timer, [Time Timer](#), or a timer app, so students can see time passing or, often more importantly, time remaining.

- Pair effort and use of the timer with positive reinforcement. For example, acknowledge effort when students meet the goal: “You stayed focused until the timer ended, great job!”
- Avoid using timers as threats. Instead of “When the timer goes off, you lose your chance to finish this,” try “When the timer goes off, we’ll switch to the next step.”
- Use baseline data to determine a reasonable length of time for the student to remain focused and then gradually extend that amount of time to help students build stamina for focus or work completion.

Timers provide structure, but they can also help build trust because students learn that time limits are consistent, fair, and predictable.

### Breaks: Teaching Self-Regulation



Brief periods of stretching are one type of break for self-regulation.  
Image: Danilyuk, P. (2021, June 21). *Boy in red and gray long sleeves shirt sitting on floor while reaching for his toes.* Pexels.com (CC free to use)

Breaks are not time out from learning; they’re time in for self-regulation. Strategic, structured breaks help students reset before frustration escalates. By teaching students when and how to take a break, teachers give them tools for self-regulation that prevent meltdowns and preserve dignity.

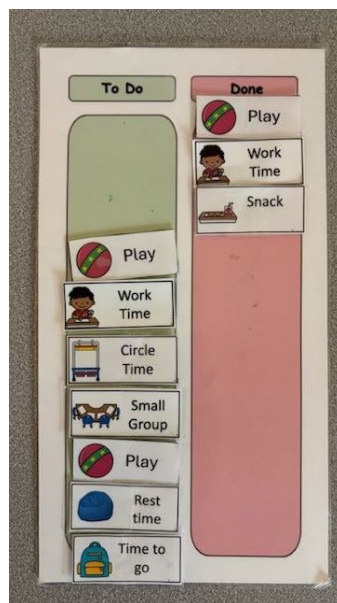
How to use breaks effectively:

- Teach the student the purpose of the break. Explain that breaks help students calm their bodies and minds so they can do their best work.

- Offer a choice of activities that students can engage in during their break such as deep breathing, stretching, or using sensory tools.
- Keep breaks short and structured. For example, 3–5 minutes is often long enough for the student to reset.
- Use clear routines. Visuals or break passes can help students signal when they need a break without being disruptive.
- Plan proactive breaks. Schedule breaks before transitions or tasks that the student typically finds challenging, rather than waiting for challenging behavior to occur. For students who typically struggle with regulation after a certain amount of time in the classroom, schedule breaks based on that data so the student has the opportunity take a break before they begin to struggle with dysregulation.

When used well, breaks can be a key step in helping students develop independence and self-control.

### *Visual Schedules: Supporting Independence and Reducing Stress*



Visual schedules can reduce anxiety because students know what to expect.  
 Image: Hawley, S. (2025, November 19). *Visual schedule*. Dordt University. (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Visual schedules make the events of the school day predictable for learners. They show what is happening and what will happen next, which is particularly helpful for students who experience anxiety, difficulty with transitions, or limited working memory.

How to use visual schedules effectively:

- Post a classroom-wide schedule. Include icons or pictures for younger learners.
- Provide individual schedules using visuals or even a simple written list for students who need more support.
- Review the schedule regularly and preview changes and transitions: “After math, we’ll go to PE. Then we’ll come back for reading.”
- Check off or move items as they are completed, including on individual schedules, to give students a visual sense of accomplishment.
- Model flexibility. When the schedule changes, explain calmly: “We usually do science next, but we have an assembly today so we will be starting science earlier than usual.”

Visual schedules reduce uncertainty, help students prepare for change, and foster independence because when students know what to expect, they can focus on learning rather than on managing stress.

In summary, timers, breaks, and visual schedules are simple tools that can:

- Create predictability and reduce anxiety.
- Support transitions and attention.
- Promote independence and self-regulation.
- Strengthen trust and build a connection between the teacher and the learner.

By teaching students to use these tools, teachers guide students toward **New Actions** that promote the development of independence and self-control.

## Token Economy Systems

A **token economy** is a structured reinforcement system that helps students connect positive behavior with meaningful reinforcers. It works by providing tokens (e.g., points, tickets, stickers, counters) for desired behaviors. These tokens can later be exchanged for

reinforcers such as extra privileges, tangible items, or time to engage in preferred activities. When implemented correctly, a token economy promotes motivation, consistency, and a positive learning environment.

### *Steps to Implementing a Token Economy*

1. *Identify Target Behaviors:* Begin by choosing clear, specific behaviors that can be easily observed and measured. Focus on actions that will make a meaningful difference for the student such as starting work promptly, staying on task for a specific amount of time, or using calm words when frustrated. Behaviors should be stated in positive terms (“Raise your hand before speaking” rather than “Don’t call out”) and achievable. Selecting just one or two target behaviors helps ensure success and allows both the teacher and the student to monitor progress with confidence.

2. *Choose Tokens:* Tokens should be easy to give, collect, and track. They represent reinforcement but have no inherent value on their own.



In this token economy, students add pieces to a football puzzle to earn rewards.  
Image: Hawley, S. (2025, November 19). *Football puzzle*. Dordt University. (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Common examples:

- Paper tickets or classroom currency (e.g., “Tiger Tickets,” “Learning Tokens”)
- Points, stickers, tallies, or stamps on a chart
- Pennies on a penny board

Make sure the token is appealing to the student but not distracting. Students often respond well to tokens that feature familiar or preferred characters, such as those from favorite TV shows, movies, or superheroes. These personalized tokens can make the system more

engaging and meaningful. If the tokens will be reused, ensure they are made from durable materials such as laminated cardstock, plastic chips, or wooden pieces. This not only prevents wear and tear but also helps keep the system looking neat and professional. Durable tokens also communicate that the system is important and worth maintaining.

**3. Select Backup Reinforcers:** Tokens become meaningful when they can be exchanged for backup reinforcers. The backup reinforcers need to be things the student will find motivating. These can include tangible items, privileges, or social experiences. Some examples include:

- Tangible Items: small toys, pencils, snacks, stickers
- Privileges: computer time, opportunity to sit with a friend during independent reading time, listening to music on headphones during work time
- Social: lunch with the teacher, positive call home, an activity with a friend

Brainstorm with the student to identify reinforcers that are motivating yet feasible to manage.

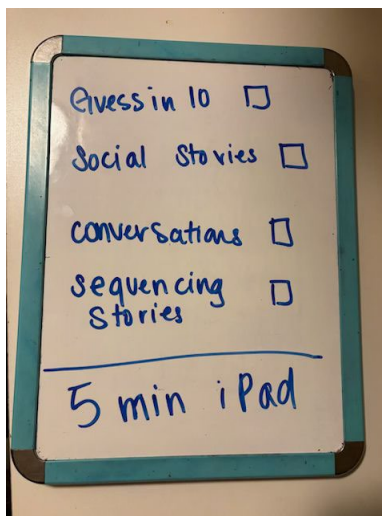


In this token economy, the student matches letters of the alphabet to a blank alphabet chart to earn rewards.  
Image: Hawley, S. (2025, November 19). *Token economy: Alphabet chart*. Dordt University. (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0)

**4. Determine the Exchange System:** Establish how many tokens are required for each reward and when the student can “cash in.”

- Younger students may need frequent exchanges (daily or multiple times per week).
- Older students may save tokens for larger rewards and exchange weekly.

Create a menu or store where students can see what their tokens are worth. Adjust “prices” so the rewards feel attainable but still require effort.



This menu of tasks shows what the student must complete in order to earn 5 minutes of time on an iPad.  
Image: Hawley, S. (2025, November 19). *Token economy exchange menu*. Dordt University. (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0)

5. *Teach the System Explicitly*: Introduce the token economy like any other classroom routine. Explain:

- Which behaviors earn tokens
- What the tokens can be used for
- When and how to exchange them

Model the process and practice together. Reinforce understanding by reviewing the rules regularly, especially at the beginning. For some students, you may need to start with limited expectations and a partially filled token board and then, as the student experiences success, gradually increase expectations.

6. *Deliver Tokens Effectively*: When giving a token, pair it with specific, immediate verbal praise so the student connects the reward with their behavior: “You raised your hand and waited to be called on. Great job showing respect!”

Avoid using tokens as bribes (“If you stop doing that, I’ll give you a token”). Instead, consistently reward positive behaviors as they occur.

*7. Monitor and Adjust.* Track data on how often tokens are earned and redeemed. If tokens are not leading to improvements in the targeted behavior or you find that you are having trouble implementing the system consistently, make adjustments. Revisit steps 1-6 and make sure you have clearly defined the target behavior(s), chosen effective backup reinforcers, and clearly taught the system to the student. Based on your data, you might also want to:

- Increase or decrease the number of tokens required for rewards
- Shift to more intrinsic reinforcement (verbal praise, self-monitoring)
- Gradually fade out the token system as students internalize expectations

*8. Fade and Generalize:* The long-term goal is for the student to internalize positive behaviors without needing external reinforcement. Strategies to support this goal include:

- Giving tokens less frequently but keeping praise consistent
- Transitioning to group or class-wide recognition
- Teaching self-monitoring and reflection strategies

### **Key Tips for Success**

- Keep the system simple, fair, and predictable.
- Make sure the focus is on positive reinforcement.
- Regularly review progress and celebrate growth.
- Involve the student in creating or revising the reward menu to maintain engagement.

### *Case Study: Reinforcing Positive Choices through a Token Economy*

Student: Diego, 2nd grade

Diego often called out in class, disrupting lessons with his comments. He also struggled with taking turns and working cooperatively with his peers. His teacher introduced a token system called “Shark Points,” connected to the class’s ocean-themed behavior plan. Diego earned points for raising his hand, waiting his turn, and using kind words when working with others. Points could be traded for small

privileges like leading the line or reading to the principal. Within a few weeks, Diego's outbursts decreased and his peer interactions improved. Sometimes he would even remind his classmates of the "Shark Rules" himself.

**Key Idea:** Token economies help students visualize progress, celebrate effort, and experience success.

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## Behavior Education Programs (BEP) and Check-In/Check-Out Systems

The Behavior Education Program (BEP), often referred to as Check-In/Check-Out (CICO), is a Tier 2 intervention designed to provide structured support, positive connections, and consistent feedback for students who need additional help meeting behavior expectations. The goal is to prevent escalation of problem behaviors by increasing structure, adult attention, and opportunities for feedback and positive reinforcement of success throughout the day.

### *Steps to Implementing a BEP or Check-In/Check-out Program*

*1. Identify Students:* Students who benefit most from CICO typically show mild to moderate behavior challenges such as frequent off-task behavior, low motivation, or difficulty following directions, but are not in crisis or needing intensive individualized plans. Teachers or problem-solving teams can refer students who haven't responded to universal (Tier 1) supports but are still able to be included in the general classroom.

*2. Select and Train the CICO Coordinator:* A CICO coordinator manages the daily process. This person should be someone positive, consistent, and available at both the start and end of the school day. This might be the school librarian, the physical education teacher, or the school counselor. The CICO coordinator checks in with students at the beginning and end of the school day, provides encouragement, tracks progress, and communicates with families and staff.

*3. Design the Daily Progress Report:* The Daily Progress Report (DPR) is the foundation of the program. It lists 3–5 positively stated behavior expectations, typically tied to the

schoolwide expectations (e.g., *Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible*). Teachers rate student performance (often on a 0–2 or 0–3 scale) and provide behavioral feedback across key periods of the school day. This feedback to students on how well they are meeting expectations is a crucial piece of the “education” component of the Behavior Education Plan system.

**EXAMPLE 2**

**Daily Progress Report (DPR)**

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

3 = 0-1 reminder    2 = 2 reminders    1 = 3+ reminders

	Be Safe <i>Keep hands and feet to self</i>	Be Respectful <i>Follow directions</i>	Be Responsible <i>Use materials appropriately</i>	Teacher Initials	Success Notes
8:30 to Morning Break	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1		
Morning Break to Lunch	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1		
Lunch to Afternoon Break	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1		
Afternoon Break to Dismissal	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1		

Today's Goal:    50%    55%    60%    65%    70%    75%    80%

Today's Points \_\_\_\_\_    Points Possible \_\_\_\_\_    Today's Percent \_\_\_\_\_%

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_    *I'm proud of you today because:*

Tip: It's best to keep the format clear and simple so students can easily understand it and teachers can implement it consistently.  
Image: Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (2018). *Tier 2 workbook & resources*. University of Missouri.

**4. Establish the Daily Routine.** The daily structure includes three touchpoints:

- **Check-In (Morning):** The student meets with the CICO coordinator to start the day on a positive note. During this time, the coordinator offers a friendly greeting, provides a new Daily Progress Report (DPR), reviews key expectations, and ends the check-in with an encouraging comment to set a positive tone for the day.
- **Feedback (Throughout the Day):** Teachers provide brief, specific feedback and scores after each subject or class. Feedback should be immediate, encouraging, and honest, highlighting what went well while also addressing areas for growth. When behavior does not meet expectations, the response should acknowledge the misstep while expressing confidence that the student will improve in the next class. Each rating is independent and based only on the student's behavior during that particular class period.
- **Check-Out (Afternoon):** The student returns to the coordinator to review the day, celebrate successes, and set a goal for tomorrow. The coordinator records the day's

points, provides encouragement, and may send the DPR home for parent review and signature.

5. *Communicate with Families*: Parents are important partners in reinforcing positive change. Families should receive a simple explanation of how CICO works and be encouraged to praise their child for effort and improvement rather than focusing on low scores. Consistency and positivity build trust and motivation.

6. *Monitor and Adjust*: Data from the DPRs should be entered into a tracking system (e.g., a weekly spreadsheet) to monitor progress over time. Students typically “graduate” from the program once they consistently meet goals for several weeks (e.g., the student earns 80% or more of their DPR points for 4 weeks). If a student isn’t improving after four to six weeks, the team should review and adjust the plan. These adjustments might include modifications to the plan or a move to more individualized interventions.

7. *Celebrate Success and Fade Support*: When students demonstrate sustained success, celebrate that success and then work on gradually fading supports. This can be accomplished by reducing the number of check-ins or by transitioning the student to a self-monitoring system. The goal of the BEP is independence.

### **Key Features of Effective Implementation**

- **Consistency**: Every teacher implements the DPR format fairly and consistently including providing daily feedback.
- **Positive Focus**: Emphasis is on encouragement, skill-building, and noticing improvement rather than punishment.
- **Efficiency**: CICO should take only a couple minutes per student at check-in and check-out.
- **Relationship Building**: The daily connection with a supportive adult is often the most powerful element of the program.

Want to learn more? [PBIS Missouri \(2018\)](#) has created a detailed description of [Check-In/Check-Out programs](#) with implementation examples. See Chapter 5.

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### *Case Study: Setting the Day Up for Success with Check-In/Check-Out*

Student: *Marcus, 9th grade*

Marcus often arrived at school late, unprepared, and disengaged. He participated in a Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) system with a trusted staff member who greeted him each morning, reviewed his goals, and gave encouragement. At the end of the day, Marcus checked out with the same staff member to reflect on progress and celebrate small successes.

The consistent adult connection and immediate feedback helped Marcus start each day on a positive note. His attendance improved, and he began to take more initiative in tracking his goals.

**Key Idea:** Check-In/Check-Out builds structure, accountability, and relationships. Regular positive contact with a caring adult can set the tone for the entire day.

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## Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring is a valuable strategy that helps students take ownership of their learning and behavior. It involves teaching students to observe, record, and reflect on their own performance, so they can recognize progress and make adjustments independently. When students learn to self-monitor, they become more aware of their actions, more motivated to meet expectations, and better equipped to regulate their behavior and learning habits. Self-monitoring is a great next step when a student is ready to graduate from the BEP.

### *Steps for Teaching Self-Monitoring*

1. *Explain the Purpose:* Begin by helping students understand why self-monitoring matters. Explain that self-monitoring isn't about pointing out mistakes, but about noticing what helps them learn best. You might say: "When we pay attention to how we do our work, we can make smart choices to help ourselves do better." Students are more motivated when they see self-monitoring as a tool for success, not punishment.

2. *Choose a Clear, Observable Behavior or Goal:* Select one or two specific behaviors or work habits that students can easily track. Avoid vague goals like “work harder” or “try your best.” Instead, use measurable, observable behaviors that students can clearly see and record. Examples include:

- Staying on task during independent work
- Completing all parts of an assignment
- Using a checklist to review written work

3. *Create a Simple Recording System:* Design a student-friendly tracking tool such as a brief checklist, a self-rating scale, or a point sheet. A checklist might include statements like:

- “I started my work right away.”
- “I stayed focused for the whole activity.”
- “I checked my work before turning it in.”

Students can rate themselves using numbers, colors, or simple yes/no boxes, depending on age and ability. Other options include using symbols or shapes such as stars, check marks, or dots to show progress. Words or short phrases like “Doing great,” “Doing okay,” and “Need help” can also help students reflect on their performance. Some educators use a thermometer or gauge visual to let students indicate their level of focus or effort. The system should remain brief and easy to use. Students should be able to complete it in less than a minute.

**EXAMPLE**

**Daily Progress Report**

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

3 = 0-1 reminder    2 = 2 reminders    1 = 3+ reminders

	Be Safe <i>Avoid aggression</i>	Be Respectful <i>Use polite language</i>	Be a Learner <i>Follow directions first time asked</i>	Be Your Best <i>Complete and turn in required work on time</i>	Teacher Initials
Period 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	
Period 2	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	
Period 3	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	
Period 4	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	
Period 5	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	
Period 6	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	
Period 7	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Congratulations for:

A self-monitoring system should be brief and easy for the student to use.

Image: Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (2018). *Tier 2 workbook & resources*. University of Missouri.

4. *Model the Process*: Demonstrate what self-monitoring looks like. Think aloud as you model completing a task and evaluating yourself: “I’m going to check my work. Did I answer every question? Yes. Did I use complete sentences? I see that I missed one. Let me fix that.”

Modeling shows students that self-monitoring is part of the learning process and normalizes reflection and self-correction.

5. *Practice with Support*: Have students practice using their self-monitoring sheet with teacher guidance. Offer prompts such as:

- “How do you think you did with staying focused today?”
- “What helped you stay on task?”
- “What’s one thing you could do differently next time?”

Provide feedback so students can refine their accuracy and honesty in self-reporting.

6. *Reinforce Self-Monitoring*: When you first introduce the idea of self-monitoring, it’s important to pair self-monitoring with positive feedback and positive reinforcement. Praise students for tracking their own progress and for being truthful in their reflections. For example: “I really like how you noticed that you had lost your focus and worked to get yourself back on track, that’s what good learners do.”

In the beginning, as students are learning to develop the **New Action** of self-monitoring, you might also want to consider providing extra reinforcement for consistent and truthful self-monitoring. For example, you might rate the student’s accuracy with points that can be used to gain access to an activity or a privilege.

7. *Review and Reflect*: Set aside brief times for students to review their self-monitoring sheets. This might occur daily or weekly, depending on student age and progress in learning the skill. Help the student look for patterns by asking questions such as:

- When do you stay most focused?
- What strategies help you the most?
- What goal should you set next?

This step builds [metacognition](#), the ability to think about one’s own thinking, and helps students connect effort to outcomes.

8. *Fade Adult Support*: As students become more confident, gradually reduce external reminders and feedback. Instead, encourage independent reflection with statements such as: “Before you turn in your work, take a minute to check it over and make sure you’re proud of your effort.”

The goal is for students to internalize the process so that self-monitoring becomes a habit that supports lifelong learning and self-regulation.

**Key Tips for teaching self-monitoring:**

- Start simple. Focus on one behavior or subject area at a time.
- Be consistent in having the student use and review the self-monitoring tool.
- Celebrate honesty and improvement, not perfection.
- Adjust tools and supports as students gain independence.

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 *Case Study: Encouraging Independence with Self-Monitoring*

Student: Ava, 7th grade

Ava struggled to stay focused during independent reading and often wandered around the room. Her teacher introduced a self-monitoring chart where Ava rated her focus every 10 minutes using a color scale: green for focused, yellow for distracted, and red for off-task.

After rating herself, Ava would take a quick, 30-second stretch break and then return to her seat. Within a few weeks, she began catching herself drifting off and used her chart as a cue to refocus.

**Key Idea:** Self-monitoring gives students ownership of their behavior. Using quick, private rating tools helps students develop awareness and self-control without relying solely on adult prompts.

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Want to learn more? [PBIS Missouri \(2018\)](#) has created a detailed description of [Self-Monitoring programs](#) with implementation examples. See Chapter 7.

## Putting it All Together



With positive behavior supports, students can adopt new actions that help them learn and grow.  
Image: Krukau, Y. (2021, July 4). *A student giving a thumbs up in front of a chalkboard.* Pexels.com (CC free to use)

Module 5 emphasizes that meaningful change begins with **New Actions** by both students and educators. Building skills that lead to **New Actions** requires intentional teaching, modeling, and consistent feedback. Declarative language, genuine choices, and calm communication can help create safe environments where students can practice self-regulation and decision-making. In addition, Tier 2 supports such as token economies, visual schedules, breaks, timers, check-in/check-out systems, and self-monitoring tools provide scaffolds that help students learn and sustain positive behaviors. These strategies are not just interventions, they are **New Actions** teaching tools that nurture independence, self-awareness, and hope.

## Choose and Use Challenge

Choose one Tier 2 support strategy from this module such as a token economy, visual schedule, or check-in/check-out program and design a plan for how it could be implemented with one or more students in your classroom. Identify the specific student behaviors or skills you would like to strengthen, outline the steps for teaching and reinforcing the target behavior(s), and determine how you will track progress. Then, reflect on how one or more of the strategies in the module could also guide your own **New Actions**

as an educator. How might using one of these approaches change the way you respond, communicate, support, or build trust with students? Choose one idea that you would like to try.

One idea I will implement next week is...

## Glossary

**declarative language.** Instead of giving a directive, the teacher shares information or observations that help students decide what to do next.

**metacognition.** The ability to think about one's own thinking.

**token economy.** A structured reinforcement system that helps students connect positive behavior with meaningful reinforcers.

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### Recommended citation

VanTol, K. (2026). Module 5: Building skills that lead to new actions. *JONAH: A positive behavior strategy*. Center for the Advancement of Christian Education; Dordt University. <https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/jonah>



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