How To: Manage Problem Behaviors: Self-Monitoring of Attention to Instruction

An effective method to improve student conduct and academic participation is to have students monitor their own behaviors. In this self-monitoring intervention, students track their attention to instruction in 5-minute increments, then meet with the teacher to share those monitoring results and potentially earn a daily reward (Dart, Cook, Collins, Gresham & Chenier, 2012).

Preparation. In preparation for using self-monitoring, the teacher:

- identifies a time or activity when the student self-monitoring package is to be used (e.g., during large-group teacher lecture or whenever the student engages in independent math seatwork). Self-monitoring is ideal for use in session of up to 60 minutes.

- develops a list of motivating rewards/incentives that the student can choose from each day if successful in displaying positive behaviors (e.g., 5 minutes of free time; parent phone call praising student; prize from prize-box). NOTE: Teachers can find a listing of potential reward ideas at:

  http://www.interventioncentral.org/teacher-resources/student-rewards-finder

- selects a timer device for the student to use when self-monitoring behavior (e.g., mechanical kitchen timer, smart phone timer application set on vibrate). NOTE: If the student has access to a device that can play MP3 (electronic audio) files, teachers can download a 'beep-tape' with tones at 5-minute intervals that can serve as an ideal signal for student self-monitoring. Those free beep-tapes and instructions for use can be accessed at:

  http://www.interventioncentral.org/free-audio-monitoring-tapes

- meets with the student to introduce him or her to the self-monitoring program, demonstrate how to use the timing device, and train the student in the steps of the daily self-monitoring procedure (described below).

Procedure. During any class session or other evaluation period when self-monitoring is in effect, these procedures are followed:

1. **Set-Up.** At the start of the session, the student is given a timer and a copy of the *On-Task Self-Monitoring Sheet* that appears elsewhere in this document.

2. **Self-Monitoring of Student Attention.** During the self-monitoring phase, the student engages in the assigned academic activity. Whenever the timer signals the end of a 5-minute interval, the student finds the blank on the self-monitoring form that corresponds to the time interval and writes in 'Y' [YES] if on-task or 'N' [NO] if off-task. If using a manual timer, the student then resets the timer for the next 5-minute interval and resumes the academic activity.

   While the student is self-monitoring, the teacher also simultaneously monitors the student on the same schedule and records that student's on-task behavior using the *On-Task Self-Monitoring Sheet*.

3. **Honor Check.** At the end of the self-monitoring session, the student and teacher meet to compare monitoring results.

   If the student is found to have been on-task for at least 80 percent of the time and there is 100% agreement between teacher and student ratings, the student earns a daily reward to be chosen from the reward list.

   If the student falls short of the 80 percent on-task goal, the teacher offers encouragement and perhaps advice for attaining the goal in the next session.

   If the student and teacher ratings fail to agree 100% of the time, the teacher should clarify the behavioral definition of 'on-task' behavior for the academic task that the student was engaged in that day. The teacher can then offer encouragement and express confidence that student and teacher behavior ratings will fully align in the next session.

Troubleshooting. The self-monitoring program described here includes default values (e.g., the student self-monitors every 5 minutes; the student must be on-task for 80% of the time and have 100% agreement with teacher ratings to earn a daily reward; etc.). However, teachers should exercise good judgment and be willing to modify these defaults when warranted. For example, the teacher may direct a student with very high rates of off-task behavior to monitor attention every 3 minutes--with this monitoring interval being gradually lengthened to 5 minutes as that student's level of attending improves. Or to help a chronically inattentive student to taste success in this intervention, the teacher may initially set the success criterion as on-task for 60% of the time and only shift that cut-off up to 80% after the student is able to attain the more modest goal.

Reference

Dart, E. H., Cook, C. R., Collins, T. A., Gresham, F. M., & Chenier, J. S. (2012). Test driving interventions to increase treatment integrity and student outcomes. *School Psychology Review, 41,* 467-481.

On-Task Self-Monitoring Sheet for: _____

Student Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Class:** _____

Directions: Set your timer for _____ minutes. When the timer rings, check 'Y' for Yes if you were paying attention and doing your work at that moment. Check 'N' for No if you were not paying attention and doing your work. Then reset the timer for the same number of minutes and repeat these instructions until the end of the session.

1	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
2	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
3	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
4	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
5	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
6	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
7	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
8	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
9	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
10	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
11	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
12	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
13	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
14	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
15	I am paying attention to the academic task.	☐ Y ☐ N
Percentage/On-Task Behavior: To calculate the percentage of on-task behavior for this session, (1) add up the number of 'Y' responses, (2) divide that number by the **total** number of intervals rated, and (3) multiply this quotient by 100.		%/On-Task Behavior: _____ %