You may decide to use a formal reinforcement system to work on a specific behavior with a child. A reinforcement system works for behaviors that have been difficult to change and/or when you want to bring the fact that you are working on this behavior change to the attention of the child. Reinforcement systems can have many forms and be individualized for a particular child or particular behavior. All of these systems include a chart to track positive behaviors and a system of reinforcers. The key to a good reinforcement system is that they allow you and the child to monitor progress and it is motivating for the child.

Example reinforcement system: Shanti has been having difficulty keeping her hands to herself. She hits other children and/or invades their personal space. Her teacher decided to start a reinforcement system to increase the positive behavior of “keeping hands to self”. The teacher writes the morning activities in the balloons on the reinforcement chart: 1) Hallway from Bus 2) Table work 3) Breakfast 4) Morning Circle 4) Music/Movement 5) Center Time 6) Center Time-Clean up 7) Story Time. She explains to Shanti that when she keeps her hands to herself during the activity time, she gets a rainbow sticker (Shanti’s favorite sticker) on that balloon. If she has 4 stickers by Lunch Time, she will get to choose a prize from the grab bag. She gets a new tracking sheet each day.

**Decide on the use of a reinforcement system.**
Reinforcement systems are effective when used consistently. However, their use requires your investment and continued commitment. You will be responsible for tracking a child’s behavior and following through with delivering incentives.

**Consider what behaviors and how often you want to reinforce.** For 3- and 4-year old children you should limit to focusing on 1 to 3 behaviors at a time. And, you should create a system that allows the child to “cash” in their successes at the end of each day. This is because young children do not have the cognitive capacity to understand how their behavior is related to outcomes across days or weeks.

**Make your goals attainable.** Set the child up for success by determining what he could be successful with and then increasing the difficulty once the child masters a certain level. For example, expecting a 4-year old to share his toys without fighting all day may be unrealistic if he has been getting into several arguments each day. A more realistic goal would be to “Share toys for 10 minutes during Morning Center Time”. Once he has been successful in 10-minute increments repeatedly, you can extend the goal to the whole activity time and next to other activities.

**Focus on the positive behavior!** Instead of “You get a sticker on your chart if you do not hit anyone during Story Time!”, say “You will get a sticker on your chart if you keep your hands to yourself during Story Time!” Often, reinforcement systems are set up to decrease the occurrence of behaviors that are not very frequently displayed (e.g., temper tantrums, hitting, biting). When setting up a system to change these behaviors, it is important to be tracking the positive replacement behavior you want to see. For example, if you want to decrease the number of temper tantrums a child has, what do you want the child to do instead of having a temper tantrum? Is it the replacement behavior(s) that you want to track and reinforce! You may find that the child displays the behavior more often than you imagined.

**Make sure you reinforcers are motivational!**
Involving the child in the choice of reward/reinforcers can be very motivating. For example, allowing children to help complete their own behavior chart by coloring a box each time they have a success can be very motivating. If you are selecting the rewards (e.g, filling a small prize bag) make sure the rewards are appealing to the child you are working with. Vary your reinforcers over time to keep the child’s interest.
### ‘s Good Behavior Chart!

(Child’s name)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>(activity)</th>
<th>(activity)</th>
<th>(activity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands to self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If ____________earns ________stickers, she gets to ________________!

(Child’s name) (Reasonable, attainable amount of stickers needed for reward) (Description of reinforcement, e.g., tangible item, special privilege, or special role)