The ABCs of ABA: Exploring the "Why" Behind Behaviors

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Key Learning Objectives:

1. Define and identify the three components of the ABC model.
2. Learn how to effectively collect objective ABC data using tools like ABC charts to inform interventions.
3. Identify the functions of behavior.
4. Explore how manipulating antecedents and consequences can lead to meaningful, long-term behavior change (Replacement Behaviors).
5. Learn how to effectively implement a classroom behavior management plan.

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ABC's of ABA

A Antecedent: ***before*** a behavior

B Behavior: ***observable*** and ***measurable*** response

C Consequence: ***after*** the behavior

Different Forms of Challenging Behaviors…

- **Physical aggression**
  - Any instance of physical contact with another person using their body or an object with enough force to produce an audible sound and/or leave a visible mark
- **Verbal aggression**
  - Any instance of a behavior where the learner engages in hostile verbal exchanges, using profanity, threats, or derogatory language towards others.
- **Self-Injury**
  - Any instance in which the learner causes physical harm to their own body through hitting, biting, pinching, or head banging with enough force to produce a visible mark or audible sound.
- **Elopement**
  - Any instance in which the learner moves more than 5 feet away from the supervising adult or designated area without permission.
- **Tantrums**
  - Any instance in which the learner engages in two or more of the following behaviors at the same time for at least 3 seconds: crying, screaming, throwing objects, hitting, kicking, banging, or flopping.
- **Property Destruction**
  - Any instance in which a learner deliberately damages, breaks, or alters items, furniture, or structures in their environment, including attempted acts.

Functions of Behavior

Medical

Escape

Avoidance

Attendance

Tangible

Sensory

Escape/Avoidance:

Postpones or terminates an aversive event.

Example:

→ A student hits the teacher when work is placed in front of him. This results in the teacher removing the work and giving the student a break. Now, when the student is presented with a task he or she may not want to complete, the student will be more likely to hit the teacher because in the past, the teacher removed the work.

Attention:

When the individual receives attention after a problem behavior

Example:

→ There are a large number of students in one classroom with one teacher. The teacher is not able to give students a lot of 1:1 attention. When Tim throws something across the room, his peers laugh and the teacher walks over to his desk and reprimands him. Tim likes this attention. Next time when the teacher is occupied, he may throw something across the room again because in the past his peers laughed, and the teacher came to his desk and spoke with him.

Tangible:

Individual may receive access to reinforcing items

Example:

→ Upon arriving to school, Sue asks her teacher if she can play on the computer. Her teacher replies, "not until you finish your math problems". Sue then begins to hit and kick her teacher. Her teacher allows Sue to play on the computer after completing just one more math problem. Next time her teacher tells her she cannot play on the computer until all her work is finished, she may be more likely to hit and kick her teacher because in the past, the teacher lowered the demand and let her on the computer.

Sensory:

Some behaviors are reinforcing on their own. These behaviors do not depend on the actions or presence of others.

Example:

- → Joe is sitting at the worktable by himself. The teacher is not paying attention to Joe nor has the teacher given Joe anything to do. Joe starts rocking, scripting, and hand-flapping at this desk. This movement feels good to Joe. Next time he doesn't have anything to do, he may be more likely to engage in these behaviors.
- → Having an itch and scratching your skin. Scratching your skin rids you of the itch. Therefore, the next time you have an itch, you will be more likely to scratch to rid yourself of the itch.

Teaching Desired Behaviors

A function-based approach

Desired Behaviors

→ Serve the same function as the maladaptive behaviors and must be low effort for the child

→ Need to be taught and reinforced **IMMEDIATELY and CONSISTENTLY** when the child engages in it

Remember...

HABiT NO. 1

BE PROACTIVE!

if not NOW... WHEN?

Proactive Routines

→ Procedures established prior to the child exhibiting maladaptive behaviors

Proactive Routines Can Consist of the Following:

→ Use of visual schedules

→ Use of timers

→ Providing choices of 2-3 activities at a time

→ Use of non-contingent reinforcement (e.g. free access to preferred items or activities)

→ Functional communication training

→ Modeling

→ Social stories

Escape/Avoidance
Proactive Techniques

→ Teach and reinforce a generalized request for a break - "I need a break" or "no, thank you"

→ Provide scheduled breaks or more frequent breaks after completed long or difficult tasks

→ Provide choices of 2-3 activities at a time

Tangible

Proactive Techniques

→ Provide non-contingent reinforcement

→ Place most reinforcing items/activities on a fixed schedule

→ Reinforce verbalizations of "I want …"

→ Reinforce pointing, PECS, ASL or augmented communication devices

→ Communication training

Sensory

Proactive Techniques

→ Teach and reinforce requests for items that meet a sensory need

→ Teach the student to independently apply sensory input

→ Place sensory items on a visual schedule or timer

→ Social stories

→ Ensure environment is rich in stimulating and interesting items and activities


HABiT NO. 2
BE
REACTiVE!
Clam Down
Choice Board
Cool Down,
THEN Respond

Reactive Routines

→ Procedures established after the child exhibits maladaptive behaviors.

Reactive routines can consist of the following:

→ Visual reminders (if/then or token boards)

→ Redirection

→ Changing people (stimuli)

→ Functional communication training

→ Planned ignoring (Extinction)

→ Instruct, Show, Do, and Follow Through

→ Maintaining Your Calm

Escape
Reactive Techniques

→ Use "First, Then" language.

→ Review schedule with student

→ Once behavior ceases, follow through with the task or activity!

→ You can use a timer to show when the non-preferred activity will be reintroduced

Attention
Reactive Techniques

→ Planned ignore the behavior not then child

→ Keep the child in your peripheral

→ Prompt appropriate behavior ONCE

→ Prompt/teach others to planned ignore the behavior as well

Tangible
Reactive Techniques

→ Prompt appropriate means of communication

→ Once appropriate behavior is displayed, provide behavior specific praise and provide the item immediately if available.

Sensory
Reactive Techniques

→ Redirect to a more socially appropriate behavior or item

→ Remind when more sensory activities will be presented later in the day

→ Utilize social stories for sensory behaviors that are not appropriate in public

Instruct, Show, Do, and Follow Through

- → The first step is to provide instruction
- → The “Show” step increases your prompt and gives your child a better idea of your expectations
- → The “Do and Follow Through” step is where you’ll help your child follow through with physical prompts

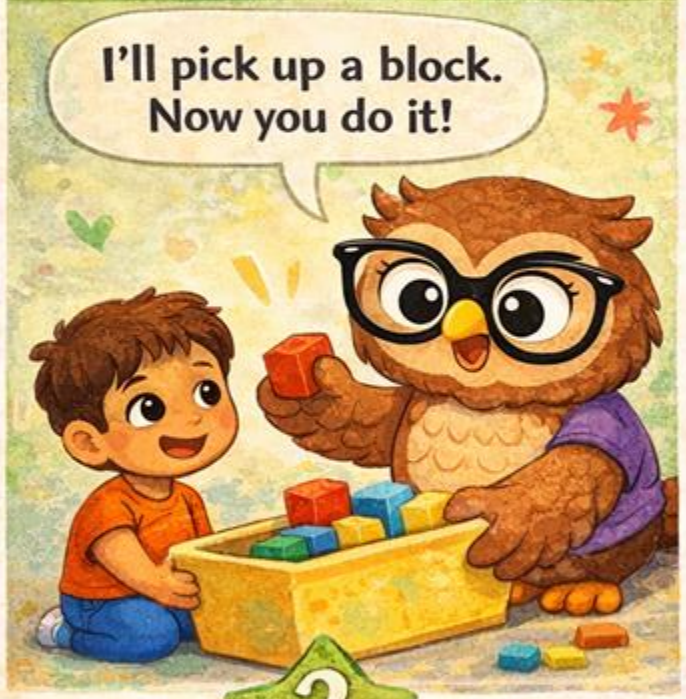
Instruct, Show, Do, Follow

INSTRUCT

1

Please clean up the toys.

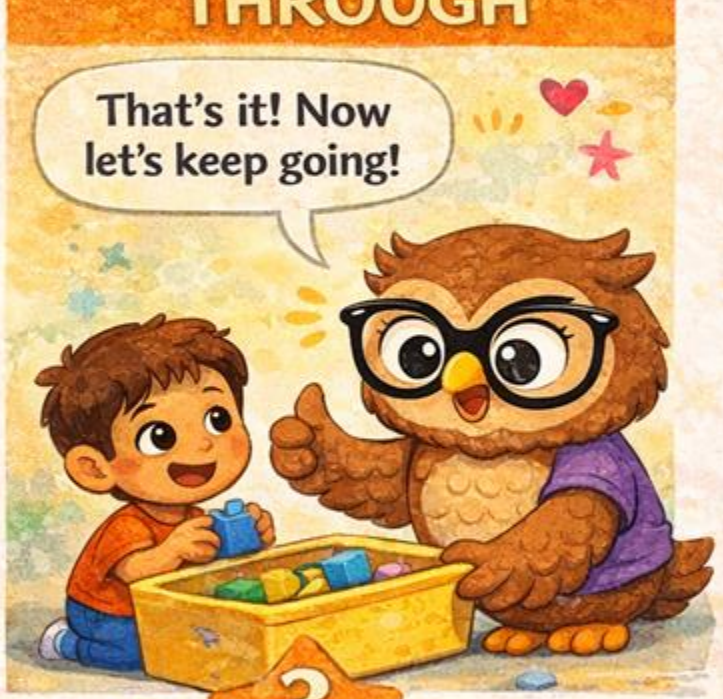
SHOW



2

I'll pick up a block. Now you do it!

DO & FOLLOW THROUGH



3

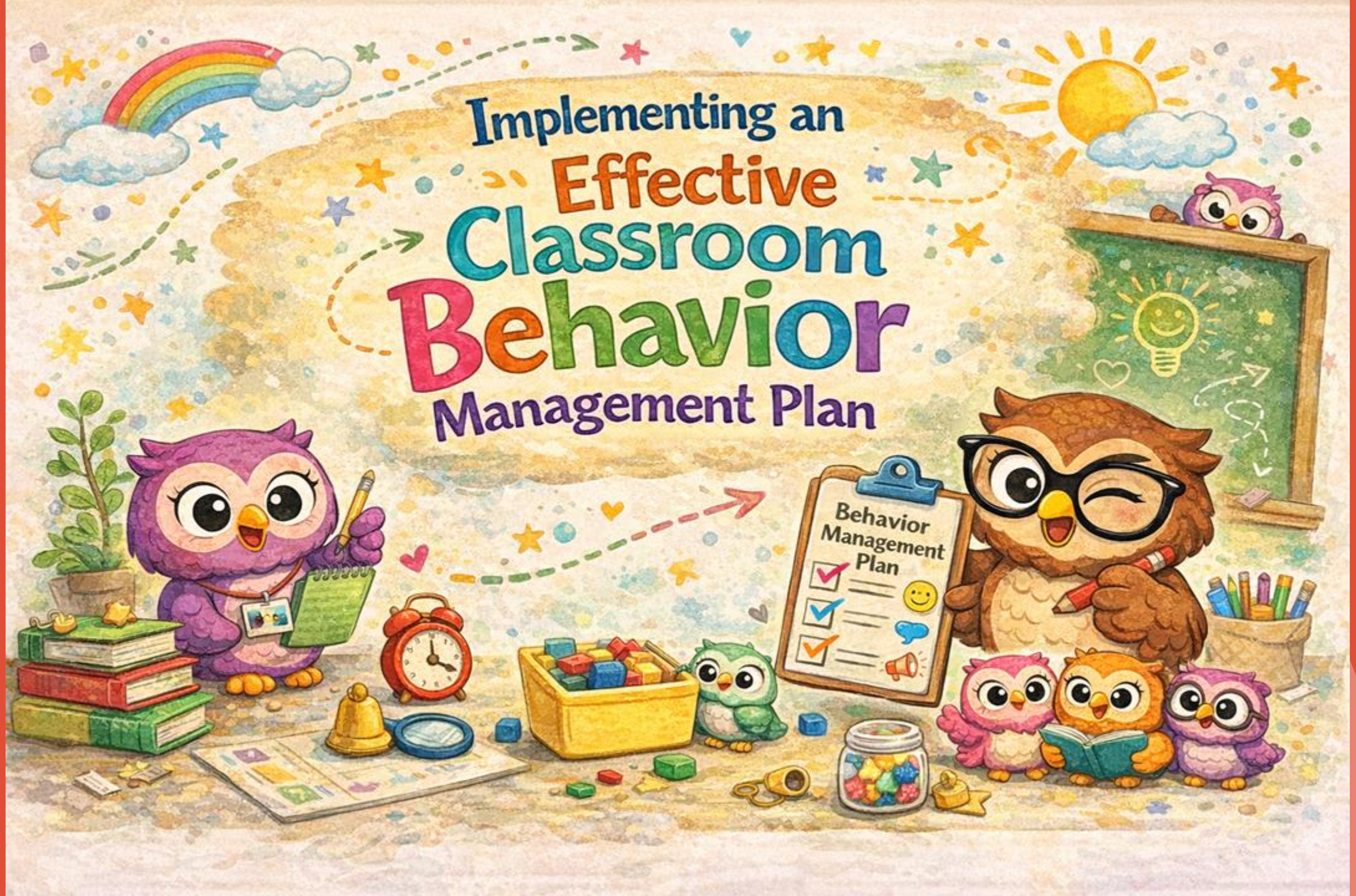
Maintaining Your Calm

→ **First,** your voice and speech should be considered.

→ **Second,** eye contact, or no eye contact, should be considered.

→ **Third,** physical contact for soothing should be considered.

Your choices should match what your child needs.


Implementing an
Effective
Classroom
Behavior
Management Plan
Behavior Management Plan

Start With Clear, Teach-Then-Practice Expectations

Set 3-5 classroom expectations that are:

→ Observable (you can see/hear it),

→ Positively stated (what to do), and

→ Applicable across activities (whole group, independent work, transitions)

Teach expectations like academic content:

→ Model the expectation, give non-examples, have students practice, and give immediate feedback

→ Create simple routines for high-friction moments (entry, materials, bathroom, partner work, turning in work, technology use)

Make the Right Behavior "Easier to Repeat"

- **Use behavior-specific praise** (names the behavior + impact):
  - "I notice you began work within one minute—now we can start our discussion on time."
- **Aim for high rates of acknowledgment early** (especially at the beginning of implementation or after breaks)
- **Use reinforcement systems strategically:**
  - Keep it simple, consistent, and fade-able over time (move from external rewards to internal motivation and group norms).
- **Reinforce expectations during transitions** and before problem times ("pre-correction"):
  - Brief reminder of what success looks like before the activity begins.
- **Differentiate reinforcement:** Some students need more frequent feedback, private cues, or short-term goals.

Differential Reinforcement

→ Reinforcement for one behavior and not another

→ Strengthen one behavior and decrease another

→ DR- means to increase desirable behavior

→ Act of increasing occurrences of desirable behavior

DRA

What does it mean?

→ **D**ifferential **R**einforcement of **A**lternative Behaviors

Why do we use it?

→ To extinguish a problem behavior by reinforcing other behaviors

How do we use it?

→ Reinforce a behavior that serves as a viable alternative for the problem behavior

Example:

→ A student is yelling out in class. The teacher, instead of reinforcing yelling, reinforces the behavior of raising his hand and waiting to be called on.

DRO

What does it mean?

→ **D**ifferential **R**einforcement of **O**ther Behaviors

Why do we use it?

→ To extinguish problem behaviors by reinforcing the behavior not occurring

How do we use it?

→ Providing reinforcement when the problem behavior does not occur during a predetermined amount of time

Example:

→ Your student engages in behaviors of standing up and twirling around during your session. You set a timer for 3 minutes. If your student does not stand up and twirl during that time then they are reinforced, if they do stand up and twirl then they are not reinforced.

DRI

What does it mean?

→ **D**ifferential **R**einforcement of **I**ncompatible Behaviors

Why do we use it?

→ To replace a problem behavior with an accepted one that cannot be done at the same time

How do we use it?

→ Reinforcing behaviors that are incompatible with the problem behavior-cannot be done simultaneously

Example:

→ Your student engages in out of seat behavior. You reinforce sitting in their seat, as it cannot be done simultaneously with out of seat behavior. Your student only receives reinforcement for sitting in their seat, reinforcement is withheld if they engage in out of seat behavior.

DRH

What does it mean?

→ **D**ifferential **R**einforcement of **H**igh-Rates of Behaviors

Why do we use it?

→ To increase the frequency of a behavior occurring

How do we use it?

→ Provide reinforcement when behaviors occur in set amounts of time or instances, or more

Example:

→ Your student takes a long time to get unpacked in the morning. You set a timer for 10 minutes, if your student is unpacked by then they are reinforced, if they are not unpacked they do not receive reinforcement. You slowly fade the time, from 10 to 9 to 8 etc., until they are able to get dressed in an appropriate amount of time.

DRL

What does it mean?

→ **D**ifferential **R**einforcement of **L**ow-Rates of Behaviors

Why do we use it?

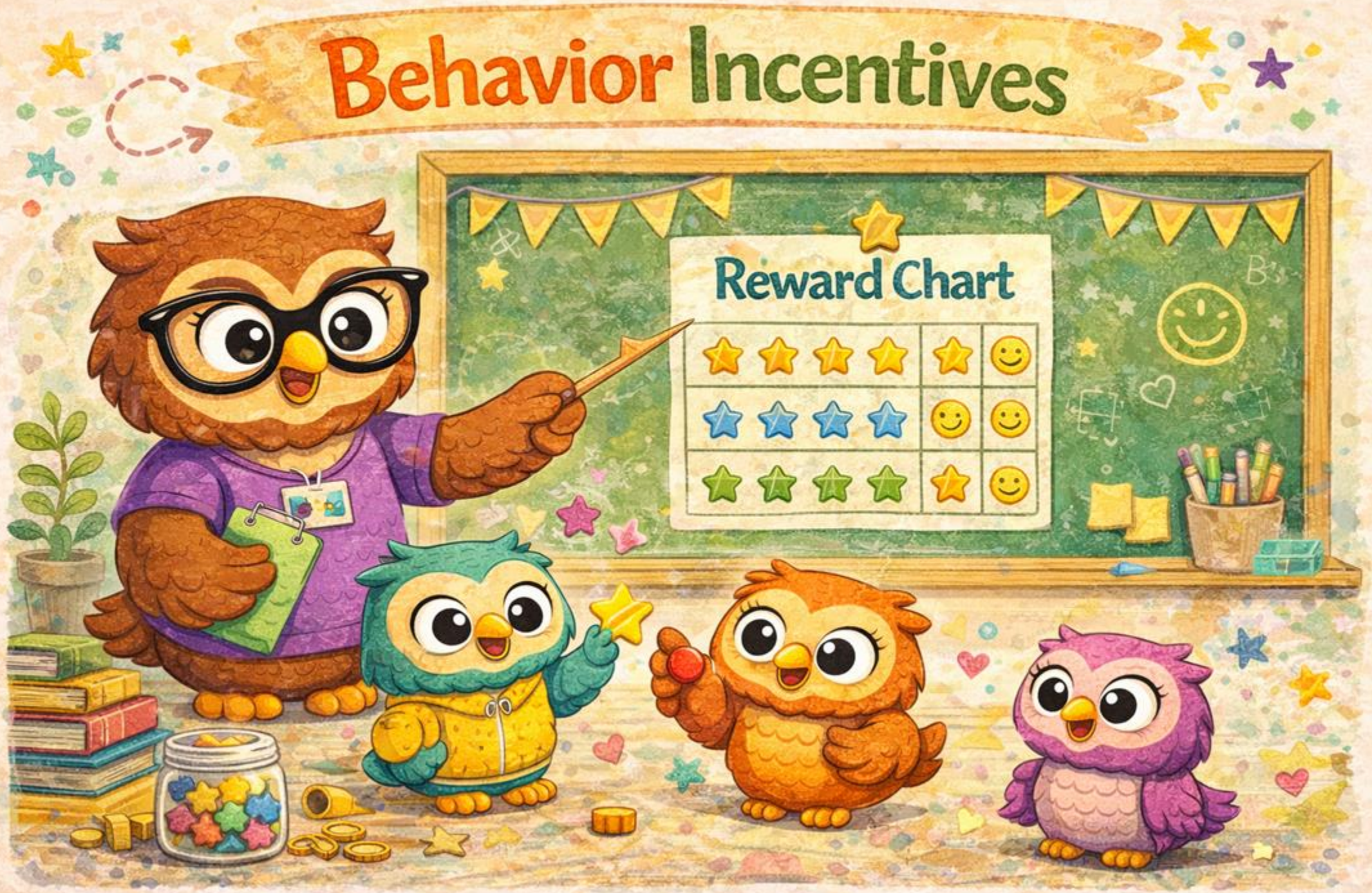
→ To reduce the frequency of behavior, but not eliminate it from their repertoire

How do we use it?

→ Reinforcing client for engaging in target behavior less often

Example:

→ A student gets up to sharpen their pencil once every 10 minutes. You set a timer for 15 minutes and if they are able to wait until the timer goes off to sharpen their pencil they are reinforced. You increase the time periods until it is at an acceptable rate.


Behavior Incentives
Reward Chart

Token Economy

→ Behavior modification

→ Bridge the delay of reinforcement

→ Keeps reinforcement salient

Utilizing Classroom Token Economy Systems

→ Identify and define the behavior

→ Identify conditioned reinforcers

→ *Ask for Token & Give reinforcer (repeat)*

→ Identify backup reinforcers

→ Establish a schedule of reinforcement and exchange rate

→ Keep records

Examples of Classroom Token Economy Systems

- **Classroom Cash**
  - Use fake money from board games or print out your own "dollars".
  - Students get paid in classroom money for things like attendance, homework, completing classroom jobs and good citizenship
  - Create a class store that includes many options for students to spend their "dollars"

Examples of Classroom Token Economy Systems

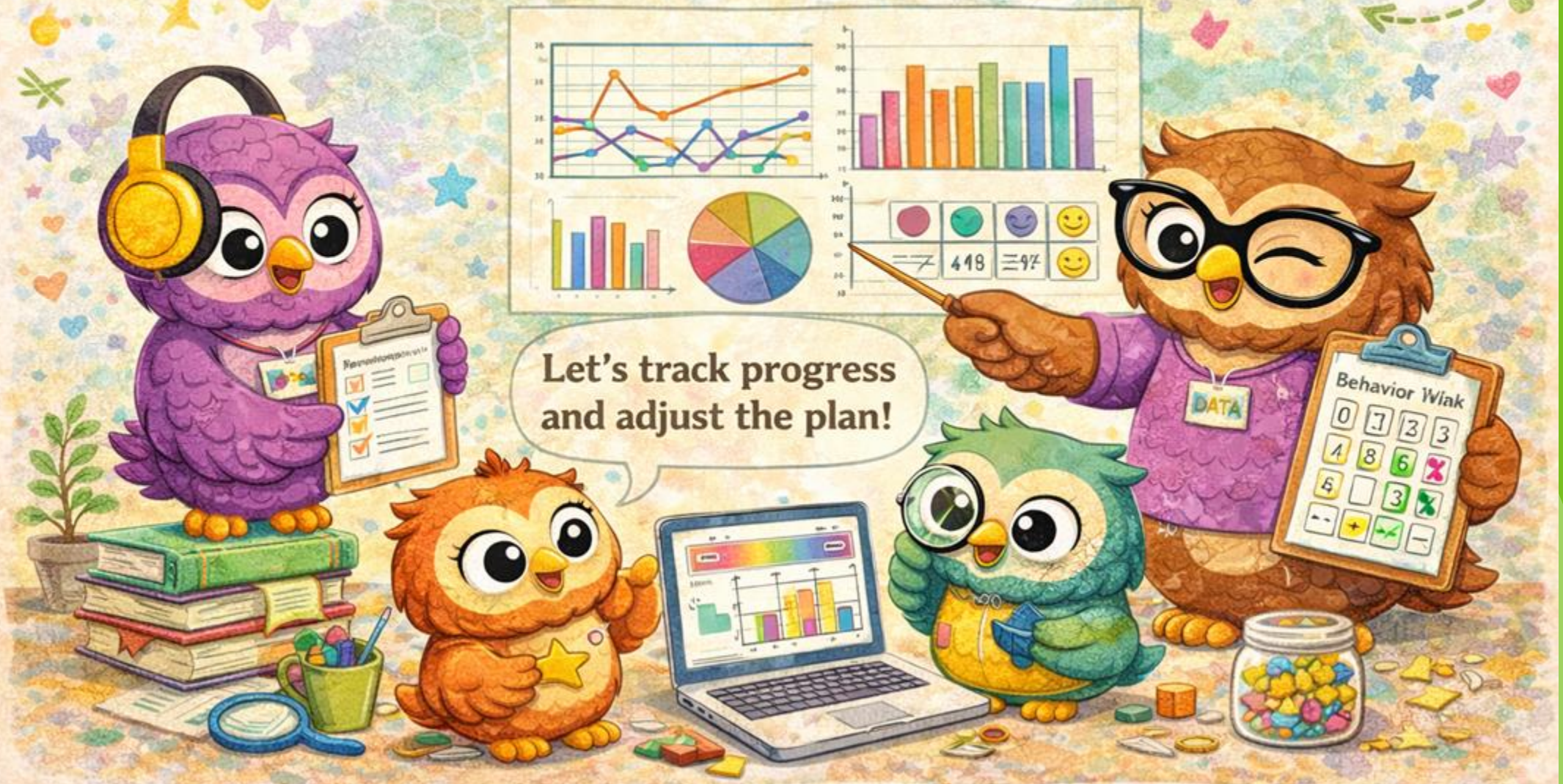
- **Token Jars**
  - Use a clear jar that is visible to the student or class
  - Teacher adds a token of some kind to the jar
  - Can be used for bigger or high-value rewards

Examples of Classroom Token Economy Systems

- **Build an Owl**
  - Choose a behavior you want to increase or decrease
  - Choose a reward
  - Each time your class demonstrates appropriate behavior, give them a body part to build an owl
  - Once a complete owl is built, give the reward

Use Data to Improve the Plan

(Not Just Enforce It)



What to Track (Simple Beats Perfect):

→ When behaviors occur (time of day, transitions)

→ Where (seat location, group areas)

→ What behavior (specific, observable)

→ What happened right before (trigger/antecedent)

→ Adult response and outcome

Lil Know-It Owls A-B-C Narrative Recording Form

Student: _____ Age: _____

Date (s): _____ Observer: _____

Target Behavior:

Record each instance of a behavior, as well as the antecedent, and the consequence.

	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:	Date: Time:
Circumstances or Setting Events (e.g. lack of sleep, illness, hungry, irritable)				
Antecedent (what occurred before the behavior began)				
Behavior (describe behavior, be specific)				
Consequence (what happened as result of the behavior)				

Lil Know-It Owls A-B-C Checklist (Duration/Intensity)

Student Name:_____

Date:	Time:	Location/Setting:
Antecedent What was happening before the behavior occurred?	**Behavior**	**Consequence** What happened after?
☐ Give direction/task/activity ☐ Asked to wait ☐ New task/activity ☐ Difficult task/activity ☐ Preferred Activity interrupted ☐ Activity/Item denied (told "no") ☐ Loud, noisy environment ☐ Given assistance/correction ☐ Transition between activities/locations ☐ Attention not given when wanted ☐ Attention given to others ☐ Presence of specific person ☐ Other_____	☐ Refusing to follow directions ☐ Crying ☐ Screaming ☐ Scratching ☐ Biting ☐ Spitting ☐ Kicking ☐ Hitting others ☐ Hitting self ☐ Running away ☐ Destroying property ☐ Flipping furniture ☐ Other_____	☐ Verbal redirection ☐ Physical Assist/prompt ☐ Ignored problem behavio ☐ Kept demand on ☐ Verbal reprimand ☐ Removed from activity/location ☐ Given another task/activity ☐ Interrupted/blocked and redirected ☐ Left alone ☐ Calming/soothing: verbal/physical/both ☐ Physically Restrained ☐ Time Out (duration)____ ☐ Other_____
Duration: ☐ <1 min ☐ 1-5 mins ☐ 5-10 mins ☐ 10-30 mins ☐ ½-1 hour ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 2-3 hours ☐ 3+ hours	**Intensity:** 1. Low 2. Medium 3. High	**Observer:**

Turn Data into Action:

→ If behavior clusters during transitions → reteach transitions + add visual cues/timers.

→ If behavior increases during difficult tasks → add scaffolds, chunking, checks for understanding.

→ If a few students need more → targeted supports (check-in/check-out, break card, goal setting).


Questions?
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