

PEACE POWER TOOLS

(www.peacepower.info)

Mystery Motivators

Summary:

"Mystery Motivators" is a recognition tool based on a lottery-like system that allows a person to select from a variety of high and low valued prizes for their engagement in targeted positive behaviors. In particular, each day targeted positive behaviors are achieved; a person can select the corresponding day on a weekly chart. If the day contains a *Mystery Motivator* symbol (unknown to participants), the person can select a reward from the *Mystery Motivator* reward menu.

Resources Needed:

- Mystery Motivator Weekly Chart with spaces for each day of the week (pre-printed or manually created)
- Identify a Mystery Motivator symbol or letter (i.e. letter "M")
- Erasables (erasable watercolor markers) in varying colors, which are available at most discount stores
- Invisible or transparent ink pen (included in erasable watercolor pack) (optional)
- Reward menu and prizes (tangible or social incentives)

Implementation Steps:

- Once a Mystery Motivators program has been established and Mystery Motivator supplies are on hand, the adult should explain the purpose of each item.
- Prior to posting the Mystery Motivator Weekly Chart, the adult will use invisible ink pen to draw Mystery Motivator symbols in random days of the week, or establish a different way to keep track of MM days.
- Identify targeted positive behavior (with participants).
- Reward menu should be created in collaboration with participants to be sure the rewards are salient and then posted for all to see. Activity rewards are often among the most effective, although small tangible items are also useful. Perhaps the most powerful arrangement is to offer small rewards frequently, but to include some larger rewards on random days. This latter arrangement is often powerful with high-school aged students, for whom small or symbolic rewards may not be adequate.
- Whenever participants achieve targeted positive behavior, they will have the opportunity to color in the corresponding day of the week in the Mystery Motivator Weekly Chart.
- If participants color in a day of the week with a Mystery Motivator symbol, the participants will be allowed to select a prize from the reward menu. If there is no MM symbol, no prize is given.

Variations:

- Although it is preferable to offer rewards for positive behavior immediately, there are times when rewards must be delayed. In that case, it is appropriate to use laminated reward cards which the participants can redeem later in the day.

Rationale and Evidence Base:

Mystery Motivators is a lottery-like system with powerful evidence supporting improvements in child and adult behaviors. This tool is most appropriate for addressing performance (motivation), as opposed to skill deficits. There is growing evidence that Mystery Motivators helps to improve academic achievement among elementary-age children, especially homework completion and accuracy. An added value is that a number of children indicated that Mystery Motivators was not only helpful, but also enjoyable. Similar evidence shows that disruptive behaviors among children with hearing impairments decreased following

PEACE POWER TOOLS

(www.peacepower.info)

implementation of Mystery Motivators. Among adults, there is growing evidence that Mystery Motivators can help improve work performance and lead to reductions in substance abuse.

- Brown, N., & Redmon, W. K. (1989). The effects of a group reinforcement contingency on staff use of unscheduled sick leave. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management, 10*, 3-17.
- De Martini-Scully, D., Bray, M. A., Kehle, T. J. (2000). A packaged intervention to reduce disruptive behaviors in general education students. *Psychology in the Schools, 37*(2), 149-156.
- Embry, D. D. (2004). Community-based prevention using simple, low-cost, evidence-based kernels and behavior vaccines. *Journal of Community Psychology, 32*(5), 575-591.
- Foxx, R. M., & Schaeffer, M. H. (1981). A company-based lottery to reduce the personal driving of employees. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 14*, 273-285.
- Madaus, M. M. R., Kehle, T. J., Madaus, J., & Bray, M. A. (2003a). Mystery Motivator as an Intervention to Promote Homework Completion and Accuracy. *School Psychology International, 24*(4), 369.
- Madaus, M. M. R., Kehle, T. J., Madaus, J., & Bray, M. A. (2003b). Mystery Motivator as an Intervention to Promote Homework Completion and Accuracy. *School Psychology International, 24*(4), 369-377.
- Moore, L. A., Waguespack, A. M., Wickstrom, K. F., Witt, J. C., & et al. (1994). Mystery motivator: An effective and time efficient intervention. *School Psychology Review, 23*(1), 106-118.
- Robinson, K. E., & Sheridan, S. M. (2000). Using the Mystery Motivator to improve child bedtime compliance. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 22*(1), 29-49.
- Van Houten, R., & Nau, P. A. (1980). A comparison of the effects of fixed and variable ratio schedules of reinforcement on the behavior of deaf children. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 13*(1), 13-21.

Julia Wesley & Mark Mattaini