



PRINCIPLES FOR CHOOSING REINFORCEMENT

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- ✓ Positive REINFORCEMENT is defined as an event which 1) occurs *after* a behavior, specifically after a behavior which needs to occur more frequently, 2) ultimately gets that behavior to occur more frequently. For example, if you want a child to stop hitting, the behavior you *want* to see is keeping hands off others. You want to see this increase toward 100% of the time. Reinforcement is an event, such as praise or giving time on TV or games, which increases “keeping hands of others” behaviors. We can use reinforcement to increase time spent silent, completing homework right after school, meeting 1-3 behavior goals during the school day, or any number of behaviors marking improvement.
- ✓ Reinforcement is never given ahead of time. If you agree to give a child something and then expect him or her to perform the behavior *afterwards*, the child will not be consistent. This is called COERCION, and usually is not effective. Children are pretty good at trying to get us to work this way. Don’t do it.
- ✓ It could be a simple *verbal reinforcer*, such as “I’m proud of you,” “Good job,” “Way to go.” Or it could point out the child’s own pride, such as “You’re really proud of yourself.” High fives plus praise work well.
- ✓ It could be an *object the child would like to have*, such as candy, cookies, pizza, stuffed animals, video games.
- ✓ *Sometimes the best reinforcers are activities*, such as time on the weekend with Dad doing an activity, time watching tv, staying up ½ hour later, going to a restaurant, or time outside playing with friends.
- ✓ It can be IMMEDIATE, that is a few seconds after the behavior. This is crucial when the behavior you want is not often done, when the behavior represents something new or a change, and when we are shifting reinforcements from an object to verbal. For example, when the child is learning the Behavior Contract (“I AGREE”), immediate praise, high-fives, and pats on the head, plus, “Very good,” are called for. When the child has followed the agreement, if an object is given (e.g., cookies, chocolate milk), it is accompanied by praise.

- ✓ At a future time when the behavior is well established, fade out the object and maintain the praise.
- ✓ It can be DELAYED, that is a few hours or a day or two after. This is SHORT TERM REINFORCEMENT. Only reinforcements that have a high value to the child can be delayed. Otherwise, waiting won't mean much to the child. Your child won't remember it when it's crunch time and he or she is faced with some impulse. If the reinforcer is delayed, the child should be reminded twice daily that it's coming and what the expected behavior is.
- ✓ FADING means spacing out reinforcement so it is not offered EVERY time the child does the behavior, but intermittently. There are psychological principles behind FADING. With AD/HD children, it is more important to stay consistent and reinforce almost every time. Only when the child is performing the behavior regularly for many days should you space out the reinforcements.
- ✓ HABITUATION is a principle which means a child gets used to a reward and stops paying attention to it. This happens when the reward was not that important to a child. SATIATION means the child has had so much of it, he or she just is not interested in it any more. If a reinforcement is no longer effective, select another, but make sure it's something important to the child.
- ✓ Understand the principle of DISCRIMINANT REINFORCEMENT. That means we both reinforce a desired behavior and discipline the undesired behavior which is its opposite - usually the current behavior we want to cease.

The discipline should be a cost to the child, not what we usually think of as punishment. The cost could be removing an object or activity, removing praise, or removing something else that is reinforcing to the child. It should not be physical punishment which usually makes things worse. For example, if the desired behavior is keeping quiet in class except when the teacher says it is okay to speak, the positive reinforcement for performing that behavior well could be 1 hour of tv in the evening. The cost of not performing the behavior, that is, of speaking out more than 1-2 times that day, would be loss of tv privileges, that is, not receiving the reinforcement, but more than that, it should also cost something the child already has, such as points in a point reward system, use of his or her video games for a day, going outside with friends, or telephone privileges for the day.

It should also involve loss of verbal reinforcement, so the child can also be told "I'm disappointed," "You must be disappointed today," "You can do better."

DISCRIMINANT REINFORCEMENT means the child cannot ignore the whole system we are setting up because that will cost something for the child to avoid changing - just as it will benefit the child to make the changes.

I VALUE

With your child, rate each of these rewards. You and your child may add some to the list.

0 = not at all important to my child

1 = not very important to my child

2 = sometimes important, a little important

3 = pretty important

4 = my child would really value this

Things

_____ cookie

_____ candy

_____ ice cream

_____ pizza

_____ special food _____

_____ music CD

_____ paints, markers, crayons

_____ baseball cards

_____ a book

_____ a toy

_____ others _____

Activities

_____ being read to

_____ taken to the library

_____ trip to _____

_____ staying up ½ hour later on any single day

_____ minutes on the computer playing games (30, 60, 90)

_____ minutes of video games

_____ minutes on the Internet

_____ a video

_____ a movie

_____ ½ hour of tv in the evening

_____ 1 hour of tv in the evening

_____ 2 hours of tv on Saturday in addition to time during the week

_____ sleep over

_____ sporting event

_____ time to play basketball or other sport

_____ swimming

_____ going outside to play

_____ doing something with Father, specifically _____

_____ doing something with Mother, specifically _____

_____ doing something with friends

_____ going to a restaurant (for example, pizza, McDonalds)

_____ others _____
