



Fall 2022 Conference, Day 3, Session 2: Trouble Shooting Reinforcement

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is reinforcement?

Reinforcement is anything we can include to strengthen or increase the behavior based on our desire. There are two types of reinforcements which are positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement

2. What is positive reinforcement?

Positive reinforcement increases behavior. For example, we show up to work because we are going to get our paycheck at the end of the month. The paycheck is the positive reinforcement which increases the behavior of going to work.

3. What is negative reinforcement?

Negative reinforcement is something taken away to increase the behavior. For example, when a child works very hard and engages in the lesson which is not usual for that student, taking away the student's homework is a form of praising that student. In that case, taking away the homework is a negative reinforcement to increase the behavior of participating in class.

4. How to implement effective reinforcement?

- Create conditions for behavior change. Ask the question “what is going to make it more likely for the behavior to continue?”
- Teach new skills. Helping the students to learn the task that is challenging and hard for them to increase the behavior by showing them that they are on the right path
- Immediate reinforcement. Reinforce the student immediately after the wanted behavior is exhibited. For example, we want the student to raise their hand when asking questions, and immediately after the student raises their hand, we reward that student with a sticker right away and not wait to give the reward at the end of the class.
- Specific behavior. Using reinforcers only for the specific behavior that we are teaching the student and not just any behavior that the student does. For example, if we are teaching the student to hang their coat on the coat rack instead of throwing them on the floor, we can reinforce the student by saying “thank you for hanging up your coat.”
- Contingent upon a behavior occurring. The contingency is the student only gets the reinforcement if they exhibit the desired behavior.

5. What to do when we build a behavior intervention plan, and it does not work?

Part of why the plan does not work is because the teacher implements it without fidelity. Some of the ways to fix the problem are to look back through the student behavior data and the teacher fidelity data to see if we really follow and implement the plan according to what is written.

6. Where does reinforcement fall apart?

- Preference Assessment: Most of the time we choose the reinforcement that is easy to access or already there in the classroom. Some of the ways to figure out a student's reinforcement is to ask the student, through observation, parent/ teacher interviews, interest inventories and paired choice. The reinforcement can change over time.
- Powerful Reinforcers: Sometimes when we pick a reinforcement, it might fall into those categories of too powerful, not powerful enough, changes, not enough reinforcers, and reinforcers not allowed. Those would contribute to the reinforcement falling apart.
- Non-contingent reinforcement
- Schedule of Reinforcement
- Data collection

7. What would we do to fix powerful reinforcers?

- Reinforcer Assessment: When the reinforcers are too powerful, the student might have a hard time focusing on their task because the reinforcers are distracting the student. It happens a lot with students with autism. Another problem is when to take the reinforcer away. Students may have a hard time accepting that and it may cause more trouble. In that situation trying to find other reinforcers that might work for the student would be ideal.
- Pair with other reinforcers: When the reinforcers are not powerful enough, pairing them with other reinforcements would develop more of a robust reinforcer program and it helps us to have more choices to offer.
- Remove the reinforcer if too powerful and if it causes too many problems
- Offer choices to the students when there are not enough reinforcers to work with.
- Remove systemic barrier

8. Who decides what's reinforcing for the students?

The student is the one who decides what they want to reinforce

9. What is non-contingent reinforcement?

It is a method that helps children to prevent and reduce problematic behavior and involves giving the child access to a reinforcer frequently enough that they are no longer motivated to engage in disruptive behavior.

10. Who should be involved when implementing reinforcement?

- The school staff. We should discuss with the other teachers how we want to implement the plan. For example, if we want the child to access their favorite toy, only if the child exhibits a desired behavior. Consistency is key.

- Families. One of the most important aspects of implementing a successful behavior intervention plan is to discuss with the families and ask for their input and implement the same reinforcers.
- Peers. If the peers are non-contingency reinforcing the student, we can talk to their peers about clear expectations and ask them to work together as a team.

11. After picking the reinforcement student likes, what is the next step?

Make sure that those reinforcers are not too reinforcing. Implement it in a way that is natural in a school setting and will not let it become something that the student will depend on. Work on schedules of reinforcement.

12. What is the schedule of reinforcement?

- Continuous reinforcement: We continue to reinforce the student immediately whenever they exhibit a desired behavior.
- Partial reinforcement: We continue to reinforce the student from immediately reinforcing to 1-2 times or every 2 minutes or every 4 minutes when they exhibit a desired behavior.