Positive Reinforcement, Negative Reinforcement and Discipline: What To Use and When

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History

- Russian physiologist Ivan P. Pavlov: Classical And Operant Conditioning

  - Skinner conditioned rats to press down a small lever to get a food reward. This resulted in conditioning, also known as operant conditioning. The term "operant" refers to a focus on behaviors that alter, the environment. It is also referred to as instrumental conditioning because the behaviors are instrumental in bringing about reinforcement. The reward or consequence that strengthens a behavior is called a "reinforcer of conditioning."
    - *www.**wikipedia**.org*
  - "If a response solves a problem for a child, then they will repeat that response if provided with a similar situation" – Ashford, Lecroy & Lortie, 2001

- BF Skinner

  - Reinforcers typically change the strength of a response. Items can only be considered reinforcers when it immediately precedes the behavior.
    - *www.**wikipedia**.org*
  - Giving a child a cookie. If a child gets a cookie then they will increase the frequency that they ask for a cookie. Giving a child the cookie when they ask is seen as reinforcing the cookie requesting behavior. It can only be seen as reinforcing if it increases the behavior. If the cookie isn't a motivator then they will not increase the cookie asking behavior. - *www.**wikipedia**.org*
  - Responses are controlled by their consequences, Skinner found that a behavior is repeated when followed by a positive consequence and behavior is not repeated when followed by a neutral or negative consequence. - Ashford, Lecroy & Lortie, 2001

Positive Reinforcement

- Reinforcement refers to anything that follows a behavior and increases the likelihood of that behavior -Ashford, Lecroy & Lortie, 2001

- The purpose of a positive reinforcer is the hope that the behavior will happen again.

- What positive reinforcement looks like today:
  – Allowance
  – Special Activities
  – Prizes
  – Verbal praise

Negative Reinforcement

- The purpose of Negative Reinforcement is to increase the frequency of certain desired behaviors. That is removing a negative event (the undesired behavior) with the hopes that a desired behavior will increase.
  – Goldfried, Davison, 1976.

- **Examples**
  – Traffic on the way to work
  – The ATM machine will beep until you take your card out, and then allow you to continue with your transaction

- Negative Reinforcement is NOT punishment

Discipline

- The purpose of punishment/discipline is to decrease the frequency of undesired behaviors.
- Anything that follows a behavior and decreases the likelihood of that behavior reoccurring. -Ashford, Lecroy & Lortie, 2001
- Rules, punishments and rewards set forth to increase desirable behaviors and decrease negative ones.
- Forms of discipline:
    - Time out
    - Grounding
    - Loss of privileges
    - Removal from situation
    - Corporal Punishment

- It is not recommended that corporal punishment be used at all
    - Due to increase in aggression
   - Models a behavior that you do not want them to have

Discouraging Negative Behaviors and Encouraging Positive Behaviors

- Redirection
- Distraction
- Modeling of appropriate behaviors
- Natural Consequences
- Praise
- Rewards
- Discussion
- Withdrawal of attention
- Exaggeration of praise and withdrawal of attention
- Simple and direct statement of facts/directions
- Teaching new skills
- Use praise and withdrawal of attention freely and as needed to encourage the positive behaviors that you are striving for in your child

When to use discipline

- If you use discipline for every undesired behavior, then the discipline will lose it's impact and not matter to the child, just frustrating you more

- If able, leave time outs for aggressive behaviors such as throwing, hitting, kicking, biting etc.

- When a child is older use grounding only for the things where the message is not getting across in all other forms of positive and negative reinforcements
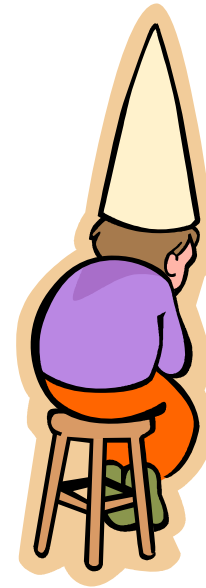
Positive Incentives

- Make sure that the incentive is motivating to the child
  - In order to do this, you must make sure that the reward is not used for anything else except the behavior that you desire or to discourage the undesirable behavior
- Depending on the child, incentives may need to switched up frequently or have a list of possible incentives to choose from on a daily basis
- Make sure the child understands what is expected of them
- Break the steps toward the end result into smaller, achievable steps
- Reprioritize your expectations and put your focus on one or two top issues, if you focus on too many things at once the child could become confused and your efforts less fruitful
- Make sure that your child is involved in choosing of the rewards
- Most often desired incentive (but least often used) is time with parents
- Often times being accountable to someone else such as a grandparent, teacher, or friend is helpful for the child

Motivation

- "Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you'll find one at the end of your arm ... As you grow older you will discover that you have two hands. One for helping yourself, the other for helping others." – Audrey Hepburn

What to use for incentives

- Toys
- Prizes
- Outings
- Television
- Video games
- Having friends over
- Going to a movie
- Non-monetary rewards
- Immediate rewards vs long term rewards
- Automatic rewards
- Time with parents
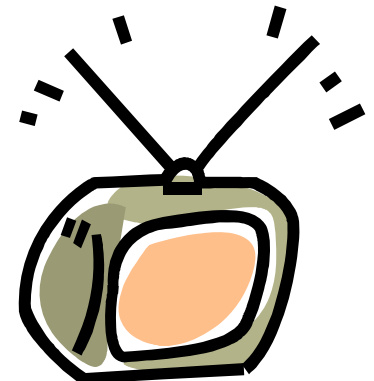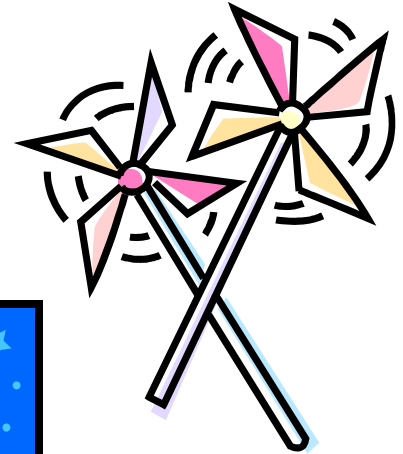
Non monetary rewards

- Extra book at bedtime
- Special time with Mom or Dad
- 15 minutes extra of TV, video games, computer etc.
- Special Desserts
- Choice of radio station in the car
- Visiting a friend/having a friend over
- Spending the night at grandparents house
- Going sledding or to the park
- Have a picnic
- Camp out in the back yard
- Have a movie or game night

Incentive Plans

- Try not to have too many incentive plans in place, as they will lose motivation and it might be confusing for the child
  - No more than 3 target behaviors at the same time
  - Break down goals into smaller increments for success
- Make sure that the child understands what you expect of them
- Can be used with any child, with any diagnosis it is just important to find out what works for that child
- Make sure that the goal that you want your child to achieve is developmentally appropriate

Resistance

- Switch things up
- Take another look at the situation to see if your expectations are realistic for this child
- Meet the child where they are at
  - *"When Inspiration does not come to me, I go halfway to meet it" – Sigmund Freud*
- Baby steps
- Have an understanding of the child's learning styles
- Make sure that there is not a miscommunication
- Figuring out why behaviors/resistance or occurring
- Keep yourself in control, as the more frustrated, upset or anxious you are the more your child will be
  - You want planned actions, not a hot reaction
- What is happening in the environment that could be upsetting your child

Consistency is the key

- Setting rules/limits
- Giving in because it was easier
- Making sure all caregivers are on the same page and aware of the plan

Social Stories and Visuals

- Social stories are often helpful to explain a concept to the child

- Visual schedule or routine with pictures (or just words if the child is older)

- The impact of visual and verbal together is much harder to ignore than each one individually

Case scenarios

- 3 year boy with receptive and expressive language delay difficulty eating meals as wanted 1 of 2 items, had a tantrum when offered anything else.
- 8 year old girl with Mom sleeping in her bed every night or would not sleep
- 15 year old boy with Aspergers refusing to shower and get up on time in the morning
- 3 ½ year old boy with delayed milestones destroying the living room while Mom trying to make dinner, with younger sibling exhibiting observed behavior
- 6 year old girl with Autism melting down when asked to clean up for dinner
- 8 year old boy with Aspergers refusing to do his homework
- 4 year old boy with ADHD difficulty sitting at dinner time, eating his dinner, and instigating brother

Resources

- No More Meltdowns by *Jed Baker Ph.D*
- Helping Your Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Step by Step Workbook for Families *Stephanie Lockshin, PhD, Jennifer Gills, MA, BCBA, Raymond Romanczyk, PhD*
- Ten Things Every Child With Autism Wishes You Knew *by Ellen Notbohm*
- How to Behave So Your Children Will, Too! *By Sal Severe, PhD*
- The Out-Of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Integration Dysfunction by *Carol Stock Kranowitz, MA*
- The Explosive Child *by Ross W. Greene, PhD*
- Lost at School *by Ross W. Greene, PhD*
- Parent Effectiveness Training *by Dr. Thomas Gordon*
- 1,2,3 Magic *by Dr. Thomas Phelan*

References

- Ashford, J.B., Lecroy, C.W., Lortie, K.L. (2001). Human Behavior In the Social Environment: A Multidimensional Perspective, 2nd Edition. Belmont, CA; Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

- Goldfried, M.R., Davison, G.C. (1974). *Clinical Behavior Therapy*. Canada; John Wiley & Sons Inc.

- *www.**wikipedia**.org*