

Chapter 19:

Using Positive Punishment To Decrease A Behaviour

Positive Punishment and Its Problems

- Aversive Stimuli
 - Stimuli can be aversive in two ways:
 - Some stimuli result in the target person feeling physical discomfort
 - Some stimuli result in the target person feeling psychological discomfort
- Reprimands
 - Harsh verbal criticisms of behaviour
 - Used very commonly in all sorts of settings because they can be administered easily and quickly
 - Usually used by themselves to change behaviour
 - Sometimes using reprimands creates an illusion of being effective
- Physically Aversive Stimuli
 - Product bodily pain, discomfort, or sensations that people generally find unpleasant
 - When used as punishers, they are doled out when the behaviour occurs, by doing so it decreases the frequency of the behaviour
 - One aversive stimulus that has been long tested is the electric shock
 - This stimulus has not been conclusively decided to be an effective form of punishment or not, some people have experienced positive effects whereas others have not

Aversive Activities

- Involve behaviours the person does not do often and does not enjoy doing
- These are punishers when contingent on a target behaviour, this decreases it
- There are three types:
 - Contingent exercise: an aversive activities type of punishment in which the person must perform motor acts repeatedly
 - Physical restraint: a punishment method in which the body part that makes a problem behaviour is held in place for a period of time, preventing the unwanted action
 - Response blocking: physically intervening to prevent a person's performance of an unwanted target behaviour
- Overcorrection
 - Requires the person to engage in effortful, low probability behaviours that correct or are the opposite of the problem behaviour when that misbehaviour occurs
 - Restitution involves correcting the effects of the problem behavior and restoring the environment, usually to a condition better than it was before the misbehavior
 - Positive practice, used when the misbehavior occurs, requires the person to perform repeatedly an appropriate or useful alternative behavior or competing response
 - Research has shown that overcorrection methods can be effective in reducing a variety of problem behaviours in hospital, classroom and home settings
 - It may even be effective in classrooms when the positive practice is delayed (i.e. after the class or lesson)

Cautions and Ethics In Using Positive Punishment

- Organizations such as 'The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps' (TASH) are against the application of punishment, specifically aversive stimuli, stating that they believe it is inhumane and unjustified
- Most other professionals however, disagree with this believing that punishment of all kinds can be humane and justified under certain circumstances
- Safety of the Target Person and Caretakers
 - Important questions to ask:
 - Does the punishment procedure pose a safety risk? (To target person/caregivers/behaviour analysts/classmates, etc.)
 - Does failing to stop a problem behaviour pose a safety risk? (To target person/caregivers/behaviour analysts/classmates, etc.)
- Using the Most Effective but Least Restrictive Treatment
 1. Antecedent manipulations and positive reinforcement
 2. Negative punishment
 3. Negative punishment (time-out and response cost)
 4. Positive punishment
- Obtaining Informed Consent and Peer Review
 - Informed consent: Approval by the participants and/or their guardians to the planned procedures in therapy or research after being told what the procedures will be and any negative effects they may have
 - Peer review: a panel of professionals examine a proposal for the intervention that details how the methods will be carried out and a rationale to justify their application for the target person
 - Rationale should include information about other methods that have been used in the past to change the behaviour

➤ Training and Supervision of Punishment Procedures

- If a punishment is to be used in an intervention, there must be written guidelines describing how the punishment will be used, the procedure, who will carry the punishment out, and what circumstances it shall be used in

How to Use Positive Punishment Effectively

- To apply punishment well, we'll need to use behavioural criteria consistently to determine when to apply a punisher, instead of waiting until we've had enough of the misbehaviour
- Reinforcing Alternative Behaviours or Competing Responses
- There are three reasons to reinforce alternative behaviours or competing responses when using punishment:
- Punishment teaches only what not to do, it doesn't teach new, more appropriate behaviour
 - Combining reinforcement of alternative behaviours or competing responses with punishment is more effective in decreasing target behaviours than punishment is alone
 - The occasional negative side effects of punishment are less likely to appear if alternative behaviours or competing responses are reinforced