

An Introduction To Behavior Modification.

When most people think about behavior modification, They immediately go back to high school psychology. They think about Skinner boxes, and pigeons being trained to peck at certain buttons. The reality is much different than this. Behavioral modification has gone through a lot of changes over the years, and has become a very sophisticated modern form of treatment for a variety of different conditions. From troubled teens to repeat offenders to neurotic patients who want to stop engaging in destructive behaviors, the techniques of positive and negative reinforcement can do wonders.

I first learned about behavior modification as a high school teacher. I work in a pretty decent school districts, and most of my students are very well behaved. There are, however, some exceptions. Every year we have a few bullies, and every once in a while some of them are very bad. A few years ago, we had a kid who was so bad that we had to expel him. He pulled a knife on another child at school, and we were actually worried for the safety of our students and staff. It turns out that he ended up in the juvenile justice system soon after that, and was sent to a camp that had behavior modification therapy. I ran into him about eight months later, and I couldn't believe the difference. He was respectful, polite, and well spoken. He didn't slouch, and he looked me straight in the eye. I had never seen such a drastic turnaround for someone in such a short period of time, and I was naturally intrigued.

When I looked into behavior modification therapy myself, I was surprised by how simple the principles are. Basically, the key is to identify positive behaviors that you want to reinforce and negative ones that you want to change. Then, through carefully targeted praise and criticism, you can change the way someone thinks and acts. This is often done in a boot camp sort of environment, But there is no reason it has to be.

As a matter of fact, behavior modification is used - to one degree or another - in almost every school in America. By praising the good students and sending bad report cards home with the bad ones, the teacher provides a form of behavior modification. When you study it in depth, however, you can come up with a more systematic approach. Through really understanding what is involved, you can help train better students and better citizens.