

N O V E M B E R 2 0 1 2

Autism Services

The Whys and Hows of Reinforcement



Building Capacity

Most of us have discovered that our students with autism are not always motivated by the same reinforcers as typically developing students. Sometimes they are able to tell us what their preferences are, and sometimes we need to do some searching to figure it out. This month's newsletter will focus on reinforcement vs. bribery, and offer some important things to remember to reinforce effectively.

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Save the Date!

LINKS/ FACTER.

Wednesday or
Thursday (11/7 or
11/8) from 8:30 –
3:30 Register at Columbia
Regional website.

Supporting Students in Elementary.

November 13 & 20
from 3:30 - 5. Register
at Columbia Regional
website.

Comprehensive Para-Training

November 19th 8:30-
11:30. This is a continuation
for staff who attended the first
two days in August

Social Interventions and Social Stories.

Wednesday November
14th from 8:30-3:30. Register at
Columbia Regional website.

STAR Training focusing on Discrete Trial Training.

December 7th from 8:30 –
3:30. Register on the learning campus.

*Contact your ASD Specialist with any
questions, concerns or requests for
materials

Reinforcement or Bribery?

There is sometimes confusion among professionals about whether reinforcement is actually bribery. There's a difference. By definition, a reinforcer increases the likelihood of a behavior happening in the future. A bribe may only change the behavior for the instance during which the bribe is used. A preferred item or activity might be considered a bribe if it is offered AFTER the student has begun to engage in a maladaptive behavior. In this situation we may be accidentally reinforcing the tantrum rather than the desired behavior. I'd like to point out that we are all working for something, be it a paycheck, or a good feeling. Typically developing students are reinforced by social praise, while a student with autism may need something tangible. Reinforcement is listed as an evidence-based practice by the National Professional Development Center on ASD.

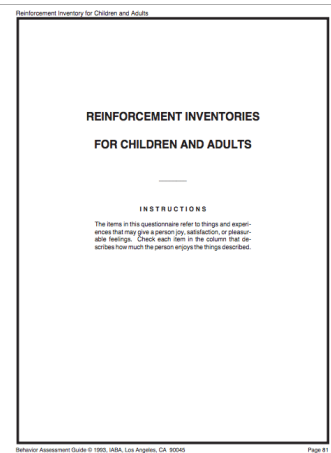
Some Reinforcer Checklists/ Surveys

These reinforcement surveys will be available on the Autism Services Website under the Newsletter tab.
<http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/special-education/6364.htm>

1. *PECS Handy Hints for Finding Reinforcers for Students.* Sometimes it is helpful to look at student's behaviors to determine what might be reinforcing for them. Below is an example from this document. You can find the full document on the Autism Services Website.

Behaviors Observed → The student vocalizes, hums, clicks his tongue, taps furniture or clicks fingers		
Type of self-stimulation: AUDITORY		
Drum	Bells	Music box
Triangle	Whistles	TV or Video
Musical Instruments	Tambourine	Stethoscope
Radio	Hair dryer	Music
Push-Pull toys that make noise	Talking toys (e.g. furbies)	Conversation
clackers	Buzz toys	Talking Books
	Toy piano	

2. *PECS Reinforcement Survey*
3. *Utah Department of Health: Assessing Positive and Negative Reinforcers in Children (2-6)*
4. *Utah Department of Health: Assessing Positive and Negative Reinforcers in Children (6-12)*
5. *Reinforcement Inventory for Children and Adults*



Rules to Reinforcing

1. We don't choose what's reinforcing to our students.

Sometimes it's difficult to identify what our students are reinforced by, and sometimes the reinforcers they choose aren't necessarily socially, or age appropriate. For some students we find food to be the most motivating reinforcer. That's OK. We need to honor their preferences. We can work to shape them later.

2. Reinforce the behavior immediately.

When using reinforcement with students, be it tangible or verbal, make sure to reinforce immediately after student engages in desired behavior or skill. If we wait, we run the risk of inadvertently reinforcing the wrong behavior. Identify the behavior you're reinforcing.

3. Reinforce every time for new skills.

When students are introduced to a new skill, remember to reinforce every time. This way we can be confident that the student really GETS which skill/behavior we're working on. Moving to intermittent reinforcement is an important part of ensuring skill mastery, a token system or contract can be an effective method of doing this. If a student's skill or preferred behavior is not increasing, consider whether you are using enough reinforcement frequently enough.

4. Pair social reinforcement with tangible reinforcement.

When we pair ourselves with the reinforcer, by delivering praise and offering "freebies" during non-work times, we increase our reinforcement value. When we pair social and tangible reinforcement, our goal is that students will begin to move from concrete reinforcement to social reinforcement like verbal recognition and approval.

5. Everyone is reinforced by something.

Because our students with autism interpret the world differently than neuro-typical folks do, traditional reinforcers (stickers, praise) often aren't powerful to them. Ask students what they'd like to work for. If your student isn't able to indicate preferences in a traditional way, and you're having a hard time teasing out what your student is reinforced by, there are a number of reinforcement checklists that you can use. You can also do something as simple as letting your student wander around the classroom and document what he/she pays attention to during this unstructured time. Again EVERYONE is reinforced by something. It's our job to figure out what that something is.

6. Reinforcers get old.

No matter how much we like them or how much our students seem to like them now, reinforcer satiation can happen with anything. Try to develop a list of reinforcers for each student so that you can provide a variety of items/activities to reinforce the behaviors you are trying to increase. This will keep them fresh and powerful and enhance the student's learning.

Research on Autism and Reinforcement at various ages from National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders

Preschool

- Cicero, F. R., & Pfadt, A. (2002). Investigation of a reinforcement-based toilet training procedure for children with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 23*, 319-331.
- Higbee, T. S., Carr, J. E., & Patel, M. R. (2002). The effects of interpolated reinforcement on resistance to extinction in children diagnosed with autism: A preliminary investigation. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 23*, 61-78.
- Koegel, R. L., O'Dell, M., & Dunlap, G. (1988). Producing speech use in nonverbal autistic children by reinforcing attempts. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 18*(4), 525-538.

Elementary

- Cicero, F. R., & Pfadt, A. (2002). Investigation of a reinforcement-based toilet training procedure for children with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 23*, 319-331.
- Grindle, C. F., & Remington, B. (2005). Teaching children with autism when reward is delayed: The effects of two kinds of marking stimuli. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 35*(6), 839-850.
- Higbee, T. S., Carr, J. E., & Patel, M. R. (2002). The effects of interpolated reinforcement on resistance to extinction in children diagnosed with autism: A preliminary investigation. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 23*, 61-78.
- Koegel, R. L., O'Dell, M., & Dunlap, G. (1988). Producing speech use in nonverbal autistic children by reinforcing attempts. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 18*(4), 525-538.
- Pelios, L. V., MacDuff, G. S., & Axelrod, S. (2003). The effects of a treatment package in establishing independent academic work skills in children with autism. *Education and Treatment of Children, 26*(1), 1-21.
- Sidener, T. M., Shabani, D. B., Carr, J. E., & Roland, J. P. (2006). An evaluation of strategies to maintain mands at practical levels. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 27*, 632-644.

Middle/High School

- Kay, S., Harchik, A. E., & Luiselli, J. K. (2006). Elimination of drooling by an adolescent student with autism attending public high school. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 8*(1), 24-28.
- Kern, L., Carberry, N., & Haidara, C. (1997). Analysis and intervention with two topographies of challenging behavior exhibited by a young woman with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 18*(4), 275-287.
- Lee, R., & Sturmey, P. (2006). The effects of lag schedules and preferred materials on variable responding in students with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 36*(3), 421-428.
- Todd, T., & Reid, G. (2006). Increasing physical activity in individuals with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 21*(3), 167-176.

If you have any questions about reinforcement strategies please contact your ASD Specialist.