

Reinforcement & Prompts

an introductory presentation developed by Jane Green with examples and language from Progress Without Punishment: Effective Approaches for Learners with Behaviour Problems by Anne Donnellan, Gary LaVigna, Nanette Negri-Shoutz and Lynette Fasbender, Teachers College Press, 1988.

What is reinforcement?

Anything that increases the likelihood that a behaviour will occur.

Let's try some examples...

- *Zachary received a token for every math problem he solved correctly. Over time, the correct number increased.*
- *Every time Sabrina talked out, her supervisor went to her and asked her to keep her comments to herself. Over time, Sabrina talked out more and more!*
- *a few more...*
- *Each time Kathy remembered to bring her bus ticket, she received praise from her teacher and boarded the bus by herself. Now Kathy rarely forgets her bus ticket.*
- *Every time Sandy made a mistake she cried, and someone consoled her. Soon Sandy made more and more mistakes.*

Your examples...

Important Characteristics of Effective Reinforcement

- It increases behaviour, whether you want it to or not! (eg negative attention can increase unwanted behaviour)
- It must be presented contingently..... Remember the "If-then" factor
- It must be presented immediately and consistently

Other characteristics...

- It can be primary or unlearned (such as food or physical contact)
- It can be secondary or conditioned such as with a token or point system that can then be traded for a primary reinforcer (this is sometimes called a token economy)
- It needs to be individualized for person, time, and place, and should be as non-stigmatizing and age-appropriate as possible.

And finally...

- It can lose effectiveness if too much is used.
- It can be social (attention from someone, time to spend with someone, a

chance to talk to a friend

- It can be the opportunity to engage in a preferred activity
- It must be person centered, person specific and the greater the ownership, the greater the likelihood of success!

Different Kinds of Reinforcement

- Positive (something added)
- Negative (something taken away)
- Intrinsic (from within)
- Extrinsic (from outside)

Hmmmm. Time to buzzzzzz.

Which is the most powerful type? And why?????????????

How are reinforcers used?

Ethically... as supportive tools... that enhance the occurrence of desirable behaviours

Who decides if the behaviour is desirable?????????????

Remember the golden rule!

Determining Effective Reinforcers

- The only reliable way to determine if the reinforcer is effective or not is by studying its effect on the occurrence of the behaviour.
- Here are some other ways to determine whether or not a consequence is potentially reinforcing for a learner...

Consider.....

- Asking the learner what he/she likes.
- Asking the learner what he/she would be willing to work for.
- Asking familiar others what the individual has been willing to work for in the past.

Some other approaches...

- Observing the learner to determine how he/she spends free time.
- Reviewing records to determine what has worked as a reinforcer in the past.
- Offering the learner a variety of things and activities and recording what he/she most frequently chooses.

What is a schedule of reinforcement?

- Just like any other schedule, a schedule of reinforcement describes **when** a reinforcer will occur
- reinforcers can occur continuously or at intervals or ratios
- The intervals can be fixed or flexible
- The most powerful schedule of reinforcement is intermittent and unpredictable - think of gambling!

The Scold

- Mr. Lang was a student teacher who sternly scolded children in his second-grade classroom when they **talked to their classmates when Mr. Lang was addressing the class.**
- This continued for several weeks. As a result of this procedure, the students in the classroom talked to their classmates more often than they had previously when Mr. Lang was addressing the class.
- Decide if the following item is an example of positive reinforcement. Focus on the highlighted target behavior to determine if it was positively reinforced. Provide a reason for your answer.

Analysis

- This is an example of positive reinforcement because the scoldings were consequences dependent upon talking and because this caused talking to become more frequent.
- As illustrated in this example, sometimes stimuli that are painful and seemingly unpleasant can act as positive reinforcers.
- When a child is being scolded, that child is also receiving attention, and especially among attention-deprived children scoldings can function as reinforcers.

What is Differential Reinforcement all about?

- Using positive reinforcement as a tool for support in the shaping of positive pro-social behaviours
- Using reinforcement selectively and with a specific outcome in mind
- Useful in precision teaching

DRO DRA DRI DRC DRL HUH????

DRO

- **D**ifferential **R**einforcement of **OTHER** behaviours
- reinforcement for NOT engaging in the target behaviour for a specified interval of time, regardless of other responses that do or do not occur during this time

Some examples

- Sue was allowed to have a video of her choice on Saturday if she did not cut any classes that week in school.
- Tom received extra juice and time with the teacher each morning and afternoon in which he did not have a tantrum.
- Donna was trying to lose weight. She made a schedule for herself in which she put money into a special clothing account for every week she did not eat sweets or junk food.

DRA/DRI/DRC

■ Differential Reinforcement of Alternate, INCOMPATIBLE OR COMPETING behaviours

Examples...

- Biting one's fingernails vs knitting
- Running around the classroom vs sitting at one's desk
- Grabbing items off the store shelf vs walking the aisles while pushing a cart with both hands on the cart
- **Your ideas.....**

DRL

Differential Reinforcement of Low Rates of behaviour

- used to reduce high rate behaviours
- establish clear criterion concerning the reduced rate

An example

- Billy was taught to use a sign when he wanted to go get a drink. Great!
- HOWEVER.....
- He asked for the drink on an average of 30 times per seven hour school day - too frequently!
- DRL supported Billy to reduce his requests to an average of one or two/hour or an average of seven per school day

As you can see...

REINFORCEMENT can be a very effective and supportive tool when used ethically

WITH an individual.

Now let's move on to...

Prompts!

What are Prompts?

The assistance provided to the learner after the presentation of the instructional stimulus, but before the response.

Prompting

What is Correction?

The assistance provided to the learner after the response to correct an incorrect response.

Correction

Prompting & Correcting

Can be very confusing! Or very simple!

The main idea is that prompts come before to “prompt” a response and *drumroll please*.....

Correction comes after to “correct” an incorrect response

Types of Prompts

- Verbal
- physical
- visual

Should be determined by the individual needs of the learner AND the requirements of the task

VERBAL Prompts

- Use verbal prompts for tasks that are often performed with verbal direction
- Be sure the language you choose is clearly understood by the learner
- Verbal prompts are the most common, probably because they are so natural
- They often work very well, though they can be hard to fade

Direct or indirect...

Verbal prompts can be direct “*punch the time card*”
or indirect “*what do you do next?*”
be impeccable with your word!

PHYSICAL Prompts

- Physical prompts involve actually moving the learner and include hand over hand guidance,
- Physical prompts are best suited for tasks which will ultimately be done independently
- The prompt should be directive enough to generate a correct response but never so strong that the learner is being physically forced to respond. Think of golf lessons...

More about PHYSICAL Prompts

Direct and careful guidance is the goal

NOT FORCED RESPONDING!

If a learner resists a physical prompt, another type should be used.

Fading PHYSICAL Prompts

- Should be done gradually
- Should be performance based, not time determined
- Fading is done by decreasing the amount of assistance provided

VISUAL Prompts

- Gestures
- Pictures
- Demonstrations
- Modeling

More about VISUAL Prompts

- **Gestures** - be careful - nonverbals can be confusing
- **Pictures** - can be useful for individuals with literacy, language or sequencing challenges
- **Demonstrations** - appropriate when individuals have strong imitation skills
- **Modeling** - **remember!** we are always modeling!

Fading VISUAL Prompts

- **Gestures** - decrease the intensity or movement
- **Pictures** - decrease their use - for some they may become a permanent adaptation
- **Demonstrations** - faded to indirect verbal prompts (remember those?)

Timing the Prompt

Prompts should always come IMMEDIATELY following the stimulus or NATURAL CUE and BEFORE an error can occur

Fading the prompt.....

- Should be gradual and systematic
- Fading **too quickly** can result in *confusion* and *possible loss of the skill* while fading **too slowly** may result in *boredom* (and perhaps challenging behaviours)

Here are a few suggestions for effective fading of prompts

- Always fade to the most natural cue (*hopefully within the environment*)
- know your plan to fade a prompt before you put it in to use!
- Be systematic
- Be flexible
- Monitor carefully

a few more suggestions ...

- Communicate the current level of the fade to others using the prompt

■ in situations that are NOT dangerous, consider **probing** to assess the learner's level of independence

■ *A Probe is the rapid fading or even withholding of a prompt*

And finally.....

As always

INDIVIDUALIZE

■ Some learners prefer correction, others respond best to verbal prompts

■ What's **your** preference?

As you can see...

...prompts and reinforcement can be effective **tools** for supporting the learning of another person or our own!

Use them with kindness, sensitivity, prompted by the golden rule and you'll be reinforced intrinsically and extrinsically!

For a delightful tutorial about reinforcement with many more examples, please see... <http://psych.athabascau.ca/html/prtut/reinpair.htm>