Power of Positive Reinforcement

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The Oklahoma Autism Network

• The Oklahoma Autism Network
  • Established in October 2003
  • First step for implementation of the Individuals with Autism and Their Families, Oklahoma Plan.

• Funding by:
  • The Department of Human Services, Developmental Disabilities Services Division
  • The Oklahoma State Department of Education, Special Education Services

• Sponsored by:
  The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, College of Allied Health, Department of Rehabilitation Science, Tolbert Center for Developmental Disabilities
What is the Oklahoma Plan?

- Outlines a vision to improve services to address the needs of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders across the lifespan.
- Developed by a working group over two years including:
  - Center for Learning and Leadership
  - Child Study Center
  - Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS)
  - Development Disabilities Services Division, DHS
  - Families
  - JD McCarty Center
  - Lee Mitchener Tolbert Center
  - Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth
  - Oklahoma Health Care Authority
  - Oklahoma State Department of Education
The Vision for Oklahoma’s systems of services and supports

• Key principles:
  • Personal preferences and values are respected;
  • Continuum of effective, integrated options for assistance;
  • Each person with autism resides in the least restrictive environment; ideally in his/her own home;
  • Full acceptance and participation in the community;
  • Professionals are competent and educated; and
  • Services are effective and evidence-based
Mission

The Oklahoma Autism Network is committed to improving the outcomes and quality of life for individuals with autism and their families through education, professional development, advocacy, and systems change while respecting individual preferences, adhering to research and best practices, and promoting community inclusion.
The Oklahoma Autism Network

At a Glance

• Coordinate development and implementation of the **Autism Pilot Program**;
• Offer a **toll-free information & referral line** to help link families with services;
• Provide **trainings and technical assistance** for parents, educators, and professionals;
• Coordinate the **Oklahoma City Professional Autism Coalition (OPAC)**;
• Provide **professional resources** for educators and other professionals;
• Provide **information on Oklahoma State Programs and other financial resources**;
• Disseminate current **evidence-based information about autism spectrum disorders and effective interventions**;
• Promote **autism awareness to the general public** through collaboration with support groups, businesses, parents, and citizens;
• Offer a **resource center** that includes a library with books, videos, and access to tools to create low-tech supports, such as visual schedules and picture boards; and
• Collaborate with higher education, state agencies, parent initiatives and other programs to **continually improve systems of services and supports** including community supports for families, workforce development, policies and procedures, funding, and legislation.
Questions to ask yourself......

- Why do you get up and go to work everyday?
- Why are you here tonight?
- Why do you volunteer at your child’s school?
- Why do you go out to dinner with your spouse?
- Why did you go to high school/college?
Answer???????????

*Reinforcement*
What is positive reinforcement?

“Any pleasant object or activity that is given to a person following a behavior that increases that behavior”

- Increasing a behavior means that the behavior is likely to:
  - Happen more often
  - Happen for a longer period of time
  - Improve in quality
“But, I feel like I am bribing my child…..”
Bribery

Definition:
The American Heritage Dictionary defines a bribe as:

"Something, such as money, offered or given to induce or influence a person to act dishonestly."
Bribery vs. Positive Reinforcement

Trip to Wal-Mart:

* Bribery

  versus

* Positive Reinforcement
Positive Reinforcement

• One of the most important components of effective educational and behavioral services for children with autism and other developmental disabilities.

• It can make learning fun, increase participation and cooperation, and help children learn valuable skills.
Positive Reinforcement

• More than simply rewarding good behavior.

• “Reinforcement” means strengthening something to make it more durable and long lasting.

• Just as builders use reinforcement on buildings, teachers and parents can use reinforcement to help children strengthen fragile, newly-learning skills. Over time and with practice these skills become familiar, and children learn to use them consistently and in all kinds of situations.
Why positive reinforcement for children with autism?

• Many times children with autism do not have a natural interest in the kinds of activities and rewards that are more naturally reinforcing to typical children.

• Scientific research supports the use of positive reinforcement for children with special needs.

• Good educational and behavioral programs will identify rewards that are meaningful and personal to children with autism.
Primary reinforcers

- Events or rewards whose value we intrinsically realize: food, water, warmth, etc.

- Advantages: desire does not have to be taught, will not extinguish, will always remain reinforcing.

- Disadvantages: subject to satiation after a short period of time, not especially representative of the natural environment
Secondary reinforcers

- Are conditioned reinforcers. They are intrinsically neutral stimuli that, through their association with primary, or other secondary reinforcers have become reinforcing.
- One type consists of praise, smiles, sense of accomplishment, all social in origin.
- Second type is a token economy system in which a person earns tokens for desirable behaviors (ex: money).
- Task demands should meet the desire of the reinforcer
  - Ex: harder tasks = better reinforcers
Secondary reinforcers, cont’d.

- Advantages: conditioned reinforcers are typically more convenient, fits in better in the natural environment, can be used to broaden the child’s interests, lessens the need for proximity to child, a token system can increase the length of time between presentation of reinforcers, less likelihood of satiation

- Disadvantages: must be taught and occasionally maintained by paring it with a primary reinforcer to reestablish interest.
Positive vs. Negative Reinforcement

• Positive – positive events after a particular behavior to increase likelihood of that behavior occurring again.

• Negative – Removal of aversive events after a particular behavior to increase the likelihood that the behavior will occur in the future.
Differential Reinforcement

- Reinforcing most any positive responses to some degree, but providing very strong reinforcement when the child completely exhibits the target behavior or skill.
Caution!

- Without thoughtful implementation, problem behaviors can be accidentally rewarded with attention or even with the removal of task demands.
- Poor outcomes can also be a result of a program that is inconsistent or not individualized to the needs of the child.
- Poor implementation can create a system that repeatedly threatens the child with the loss of rewards instead of one that recognizes and celebrates positive behaviors.
Guidelines

1. The desired behavior is clearly described in observable and measurable terms rather than in a broad and vague manner.

   Ex: Instead of saying that child needs to “be good” in order to get reinforcement, say the child needs to have a quiet mouth for 5 minutes.

   The child needs to be able to and understand exactly what it is that he needs to do in order to produce the desired behavior.
Guidelines, cont’d…

2. Consequences for correct and incorrect behavior should be easily distinguishable

You need to make it very clear as to what you are rewarding the child for.

You can do this by giving the child the reinforcer immediately after the child does the behavior.

If you wait too long, the child might get confused as to why they are being rewarded.

If you wait too long, the child has more opportunity to produce challenging behaviors after he already produced the positive behavior.
3. Reinforcers are chosen based upon the child's personal preferences and past successes. (There are many categories to choose from, including edibles, materials, sensory items, activities, and tokens or points to save and trade in.)

Reinforcers have to be individualized or they will not work! You have to start with things the child is interested in and build from there.

4. When a reinforcer is given, the teacher also gives enthusiastic praise and describes the behavior to the child.

5. Reinforcement is used regularly and consistently.

6. The reinforcer is controlled so the child does not have easy contact with it at other times.
Guidelines, cont’d…

7. A record of the child's performance is kept so the effects of the program can be determined in order to decide if changes should be made.

8. If reinforcement is being presented after each trial, short-lived reinforcers should be used. Ex: single M&M, bubbles, quick high five.

What is a token economy?

- System in which an individual earns tokens for targeted behaviors. Once he has collected a predetermined number of tokens he can trade them in for an item or activity that he desires.
- Ex: Most common token system: Money!!
Goals of token economy?

- Increased ability to delay gratification
  - Good for teaching child how to wait
- Increased sense of time
  - Good for helping children learn about time
- Lessened satiation
  - Child does not get reinforcers as often, so reinforcers stay reinforcing longer
Goals for token system, cont’d…

- **Increased teaching rate**
  - More successive teaching opportunities because you do not have to stop after each one and give the reinforcers. The tokens are much quicker.

- **More natural reinforcement**
  - Looks much more natural to give a small token after desirable behaviors versus giving a gummy bear every time does a good behavior.

- **Increased selection of reinforcers**
  - More options are available to use through this type of system.
What does it look like?
Basic Token Economy System

• Before activity, child gets to pick what he wants to work for.
• Teacher/parents clearly demonstrates/assists child to do the behavior needed to earn the token.
• Child earns enough tokens and gets the reward.
Reinforcement example

I am working for:

symbol here

token here

cookies
Punch Card

Advantages:
• They are cheap. Run off four cards per sheet of paper, and it's not expensive at all to use even large numbers of punch cards in your program.

• With punch cards it's easy to create token systems for specific activities or behaviors. A few Boardmaker symbols and some standard card layouts and you've got a wide variety of available cards.

• Punch cards are very convenient and rather discrete. Kids can carry cards with them unobtrusively, and it's easy for a teacher to carry around a small hole punch to dole out punches during targeted activities.
Unifix Cubes

• Unifix cubes lend themselves easily to a token economy, where the kids get a cube for each correct response, or when caught exhibiting good small group behavior, and can earn prizes for achieving a certain number, but many kids naturally begin to compare the height of their towers to their neighbors'.

• Even if such comparison isn't spontaneous, you can get kids comparing and counting and measuring pretty easily with this approach.
Money

- Money (either actual currency or "school money") can make a very good token system for kids, especially upper elementary or older kids, where stickers and such might not be as appropriate.
- Working with money is a very functional skill, and using money as a token system lends itself to lots of great math concepts (making change, budgeting, etc.).
- Token systems can be used to teach or reinforce money skills. For instance, you could set the price for a jump on the trampoline at five nickels, but might only hand out pennies as reinforcement. The child needs to figure out when he's got enough pennies to make a nickel and cash them in.
Guidelines for creating and using a token economy system

• Should clearly provide a visual representation of how much the child has accomplished and how much more he needs to accomplish before reinforcement is delivered. Ex: separate velcro dots, printed squares.

• Should be specific to each child, address specific targeted behaviors, and clearly communicate the expectations and rules to the child.

• Choices should be a big part of your token system!

• Pair verbal praise with the presentation of the token.

• Good opportunity to introduce some real world math skills to the child.

• Token reinforcement systems should be used only if your child is able to understand the idea of exchanging tokens for rewards.

• Explain the token system to your child.

• Gradually fade the token reinforcement system – make it more mature as child gets older.
Frequently Asked Questions....
But reinforcement is not working for my child!!!

Things to think about:

• Can the child do the skill expected or do we need to break it down into smaller steps?
• Are the reinforcers strong enough, do we need to re-evaluate?
• Is the child earning the reinforcers frequently enough?
But, my child only likes _____.

- Start there! Start with that one thing, even if you feel the child gets “obsessed” with it.
- Start working on teaching your child a schedule with those special interests.
- You have to build trust with your child that you will give the child that item after he does some work.
- Your main goal is going to be to expand your child’s list of reinforcers.
But, I can’t find anything my child likes??

- All kids have preferences and likes, we just have to be creative and think outside the box!
- Start by watching and observing what they are doing.
- Sabotage the situation! When you see the child engaging in a preferred activity, sabotage it in order to encourage communication through reinforcement.
- After you get the child in a good system, your next goal is to build the list of reinforcers. Start introducing your child to new items that might eventually become reinforcing.
How do I get my child to like more things?

- Start by pairing things he already likes with new things.
- Use the desired items to reinforce the new items.
  - (ex: bubbles to learn playdough).
- Make a list of the things your child already likes, find common themes, and then try to find more toys/activities/food that are similar, but different.
- Talk with teachers and other adults in child’s environment to see if they have anything your child likes that you do not know about.
- Change up reinforcers often so child does not get bored!
But, my child is constantly changing what they want!

- This is a good, but challenging issue. It’s good because this means your child probably has a lot of things they like.
- However, it’s a challenge because you have to stay several steps in front of them.
- Will be important for you to do reinforcement assessments frequently, especially at school, in order to understand what is most motivating to them at the time.
Reinforcer Assessment
Reinforcer Assessment

• See Hand-Out
How do we avoid reinforcing undesirable behaviors?

- Children often continue undesirable behaviors because they are reinforced in some way. Some things that may cause undesirable behaviors to continue are:
  - Attention or rewards
  - Escape from a task
  - Self-reinforcing activities
Three strategies that can be used to reduce undesirable behaviors:

• Interruption and redirection – includes stopping the behavior, directing to a desired behavior, and praising for the desired behavior.
• Ignoring (extinction) – when you stop giving attention to a behavior that has been reinforced in the past.
• Taking away a reinforcer (response cost) – taking away a reinforcing object/privilege when an undesirable behavior occurs.
Bringing it home....

List a few reinforcers for your child that could be used to increase behavior during the following activities:

Mealtimes: ________________________________
Playtime: _______________________________
Riding in car: ___________________________
Bathing: _________________________________
Outdoor play: ____________________________

(See attached sheet)
Questions????
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