

BEHAVIOR BASICS

Positive Reinforcement

- Giving a pleasant consequence (a reinforcer) to increase a behavior
- Reinforcers can include toys, privileges, attention, and praise
- Some unpleasant things can also be reinforcers. For example, since children are often reinforced by parental attention, even negative parental attention (yelling) may increase behaviors.
- For reinforcers to be most effective, they must occur immediately after a behavior.

Escape

- A type of reinforcement in which something unpleasant is taken away to increase a behavior.
 - For example, a child may be allowed to leave the dinner table (“escape”) after trying several bites of food
- Sometimes things we think are punishing actually reinforce a child’s behavior
 - For example, a child who doesn’t like to sit at the dinner table is told she will have to leave unless she behaves appropriately – she then acts up more to leave the dinner table.

Ignoring

- Ignoring is one type of extinction
- Ignoring can be used to decrease behaviors
- Ignoring involves **not** giving any attention to a behavior.
 - For example, if a child cries and whines to get your attention and you start ignoring the crying, eventually he/she will stop because this behavior is no longer reinforced.
- **But, it may get worse before it gets better**
 - When using ignoring, the behavior often gets worse before it gets better. If you begin ignoring the child’s crying, you can expect longer, louder crying at first. However, if you continue to ignore, it will stop. It is very important that you continue with the ignoring. If you initially ignore but give in when it becomes too bothersome, you will have taught the child that if he/she cries long enough, he/she will get his/her way.

Differential Reinforcement

- This involves the use of both positive reinforcement and ignoring (extinction)
 - For example, if a child is throwing toys (in an effort to get your attention) ignore the throwing behavior and once he/she does **any other** appropriate behavior, reinforce that behavior quickly.