

# ABA in the Classroom

## Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is the presentation of something following a specific behaviour that increases the likelihood that that behaviour will occur again. It is one of the most powerful tools for shaping or changing behaviour (both positive and/or negative); it focuses on the positive behaviours while minimizing attention received for any inappropriate behaviours (especially important for attention seeking behaviours).

Reinforcement must be individualized, as what motivates one student may not motivate another. Speaking with the student and/or completing a reinforcement survey can help in identifying possible reinforcements. Motivators can also change over time, so it is important to monitor reinforcement effectiveness. If what is delivered as reinforcement is not preferred by the student, it is likely that it will not be effective.

There are different types of reinforcers that can be used; however, the type of reinforcers will depend on the student and situation. Types of reinforcers include:

- *Tangible (physical reward of a desired item/object)*
- *Activity based (ability to participate in a preferred activity)*
- *Token (tokens/points earned that can be exchanged for something of value)*
- *Social (social praise, high five, thumbs up)*
- *Natural (internal motivation/satisfaction for completing task)*

If using tangible reinforcers, it is important to provide student choice and avoid over use of the same reward (satiation can decrease motivation). The use of tangible reinforcers may be required initially to help build intrinsic motivation; however, a plan should be in place to fade out the use of extrinsic motivators to more natural forms of reinforcement to support student independence.

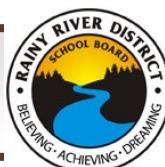


### Reinforcement Guidelines

- **Reward immediately**
  - The shorter the amount of time between a behavior and the presentation of positive reinforcement, the stronger the connection will be
  - If a long period of time elapses between the behavior and the reinforcement, the weaker the connection will be and it becomes more likely that an intervening behavior might accidentally be reinforced
- **Be enthusiastic**
- **Be specific and label the positive behaviour**
  - Ensure the student is aware of what behaviour earned them reinforcement
- **Praise effort**
  - Responses should encourage, support, and empower students to achieve positive outcomes and promote a growth mindset
- **Be consistent**
- **Be frequent**
  - As positive behaviour increases, the frequency of reinforcement can be faded
  - A presentation schedule (schedule of reinforcement) should be considered as positive behaviour increase; fading too quickly can result in the reemergence of inappropriate behaviour, while fading too slowly can result in a decrease in student independence and motivation

“Consistent positive reinforcement is the fuel that keeps the fire burning long enough to achieve any change you desire.”

~ Anonymous



## Reinforcement Myths

### **Children should already know what is expected of them and how to behave.**

- Behaviour that is acknowledged is more likely to reoccur
- Behaviour that is ignored is less likely to be repeated
- No good behaviour should be taken for granted, or it may decline

### **Praising is unnatural and kids will think it's phony.**

- The more you praise, the more natural it will feel
- Best to use a ratio of 5:1 (5 positives:1 negative)
- If you praise appropriate behaviours that truly happened, there is nothing phony about it
- Kids who get praised tend to praise others

### **Praise is manipulative and cohesive.**

- The purpose of praise is to reinforce and increase student behaviour with their knowledge
- Praise helps clearly describe expectations so that students can successfully meet them

### **Giving a reward is like bribing students to do what you want them to do.**

- A reward reinforces a desired behaviour that has already occurred
- A bribe attempts to influence or persuade someone to produce a desired behaviour that has not happened yet

### **Extrinsic rewards decrease internal motivation; kids will become dependent on tangible rewards.**

- Tangible rewards should always be accompanied with social praise outlining why the child is receiving the reinforcement
- When a message that recognizes a student's efforts as being responsible for success is given with a reward internal motivation is strengthened

### **Rewards should be saved for special achievements.**

- By acknowledging only the “big” achievements, it sends the message that everyday behaviours are not important
- Small steps on the way to achievement needs to be recognized

### **Only certain students require reinforcement.**

- People of all ages, including adults need to be recognized and acknowledged for their efforts
- Students of all ages need recognition, praise, and rewards, particularly during the difficult transition of adolescence

### **References:**

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Sprague, J.R. & Golly, A. (2004). *Best behaviour: Building positive behaviour supports in schools*. Sopris West.

