



PBS Practice

The purpose of the series on PBS Practices is to provide information about important elements of positive behavior support. PBS Practices are not specific recommendations for implementation, and they should always be considered within the larger context of planning, assessment and comprehensive support.

Positive Consequence Strategies

Behavior may be interpreted as functional (often communicative), purposeful, and meaningful to an individual. In other words, people engage in problem behavior because they either get something or avoid something as a result. By manipulating consequences it may be possible to influence a person's motivation, and change long-standing behavior patterns.

Effective interventions involve managing consequences so that reinforcement is given for desired behavior (e.g., use of replacement skills) and withheld in response to problem behavior. This makes problem behavior less effective than positive behavior for the person. Positive consequence strategies are based on a functional assessment and incorporate the most natural, least intrusive consequences that adequately address the behavior. Types of reinforcement include social interaction, activities, sensory outcomes, tangible rewards, and opportunities to escape uncomfortable circumstances.

<i>Examples: Hypotheses</i>	<i>Consequence Strategies</i>
<i>When an adult's attention is withdrawn or focused on other children, Lisa makes noises; her behavior results in the adult talking to her and moving closer to her.</i>	<i>Provide attention whenever Lisa asks for it appropriately, even if just to say "I'll be there in a minute." Ignore all noises. Gradually extend wait periods and reward Lisa for waiting quietly.</i>
<i>When unanticipated changes in the routine occur, Ben throws his materials; having to pick them up delays the transition to the next activity.</i>	<i>Respond promptly when Ben asks for clarification regarding schedule changes. Reward him for using relaxation strategies. Have him pick up his materials after he finishes the next activity.</i>
<i>When Donna finishes an activity early, she bites her fingernails and cuticles; this gives her another form of stimulation.</i>	<i>Make sure that Donna is provided something else to do when she asks and/or that the necessary materials are available.</i>

In order to be effective, reinforcement must compete with the outcomes achieved through the problem behavior. Some considerations include the reinforcement schedule (frequency of rewards), magnitude (amount or intensity), and immediacy (delay between behavior and rewards). For example, if a

problem behavior typically results in a rapid, highly emotional response from others, reinforcement for positive behavior must result in a similar or more intense response. In addition, situational variables such as the person's current level of deprivation (e.g., hunger, recent access to reinforcement) can also affect the effectiveness of a reward.

Frequently-Asked Questions

1. *We have heard criticisms of reinforcement programs because they are contrived. How would you respond to this?* This can be a legitimate concern. Therefore, to the greatest extent possible, reinforcers should be natural, rather than contrived. For example, smiles and positive comments from a friend would generally be seen as more natural than carrying a point card or receiving M&M's every two minutes. When selecting reinforcers, it is also important to remember that the most effective consequences utilize outcomes that are currently maintaining behavior (e.g., problem behavior is motivated by escaping difficult tasks – reinforcement involves breaks from work).
2. *It sounds like positive reinforcement simply involves giving a person whatever they want whenever they want it. Will this go on forever?* Initially it is important to reward all positive (i.e., replacement) behaviors immediately and consistently. However, eventually people need to learn to tolerate periods of delay and less consistent schedules of reinforcement. Behavioral support plans should include methods to gradually thin reinforcement and shift to more natural contingencies.
3. *Does PBS ever condone the use of punishment to address behavior?* Withholding reinforcement for problem behavior (i.e., extinction) is technically an example of punishment. Proponents of PBS acknowledge that controlling access to reinforcement is necessary when trying to change behavior. What PBS does not condone is the use of aversive (e.g., demeaning, painful) procedures to suppress behavior. Such approaches have been demonstrated to be ineffective in producing durable changes in people's behavior and do not improve to quality of their lives.

Other Resources

Carr, E.G., Robinson, S. & Palumbo, L.W. (1990). The wrong issue: Aversive versus nonaversive treatment. The right issue: Functional versus nonfunctional treatment. In A. Repp & N. Singh (Eds.), Perspectives on the use of nonaversive and aversive interventions for persons with developmental disabilities (pp. 381-401). Sycamore: Sycamore Publishers.

Iwata, B.A., Vollmer, T.R., Zarcone, J.R., & Rodgers, T.A. (1993). Treatment classification based on behavioral function. In R. Van Houton & S. Axelrod (Eds.), Behavior analysis and treatment (pp. 101-125). New York: Plenum Press.

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