



# Reinforcement



PROJECT ACCESS

## DEFINITION

Reinforcement is a foundational practice that is used with other evidence-based practices. Reinforcement describes the relationship between learner behavior and a consequence that follows the behavior. This relationship is reinforcing only if the consequence increases the likelihood the learner will perform the skill or behavior in the future. Positive Reinforcement is when you add something that will increase a behavior in the future. Negative Reinforcement is when you take away something aversive and it increases the behavior in the future.

## POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

When we use the term positive reinforcement, we usually mean we give the student something good or something he wants. Technically, this is incorrect. In behavioral terms, positive reinforcement means anything that is added to the environment that makes it more likely the behavior you want will increase. For example, we would like Tina to stay in her seat for a certain amount of time. After she has remained seated for say, three minutes, we give a token on her token chart (she exchanges her tokens when she has all 5 for access to the toys). In the future, Tina will stay in her seat to earn more play time.

## NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT

Now, when most people think about negative reinforcement, they usually really mean punishment. This is also incorrect. In behavioral terms, negative reinforcement means anything that is taken away from the environment that causes a behavior to increase. Here's one of our favorite examples. Eli hits his teacher when he is presented with a writing task. When this happens, his teacher has him go to time-out. We know Eli is trying to avoid the writing task (because we did a FBA). So, taking away time in the classroom is actually making the behavior increase. Time-out helps him avoid the task. It is reinforcing. Instead of engaging in hitting, we could teach him to say, "No thank you". Then we would remove the writing task and allow him to take a 2 minute break.

It helps to think of reinforcement as add and subtract, rather than good or bad!

Reinforcement (Increase / maintain behavior)	
<b>Positive</b> (add stimulus)	<b>Add</b> pleasant stimulus to <b>Increase / maintain</b> behavior
<b>Negative</b> (remove stimulus)	<b>Remove</b> aversive stimulus to <b>Increase / maintain</b> behavior

## BEHAVIOR SPECIFIC PRAISE

We should always be pairing reinforcement with Behavior Specific Praise. You can ALWAYS find SOMETHING to praise a learner for and provide reinforcement. Students should be earning reinforcement alllll dayyyy longggg!

- "Great walking feet into the classroom! You get your first token!"
- "I am so happy you're here today! I'm putting your first smile on your board because you came to school!"
- "You're doing an amazing job playing with your friends!"
- "You are rocking an inside voice during your free time!"
- "Timer went off. That was such a great reaction to the timer and you kept a calm, quiet voice."
- "I love how you came right to the table and sat in your seat! You get another token!"

## HOW OFTEN DO I REINFORCE?

Every learner is different but it is RARE that they can wait until the end of the day/week. Reinforcement should be constant throughout the day.

## WAYS TO REINFORCE?

- Small frequent breaks/reinforcement (Tickles, edibles, short activities, ipad.)
- Bigger activities to save up for (Extra recess, games, outings, etc)
- 1:1 immediate reinforcement after each correct response/behavior

## RESOURCES

- [Reinforcer Autism Minute Video](#)
- [Token Boards Autism Minute Video](#)
- [FREE Printable Token Boards on Website](#)

## FADING SYSTEMS

You may be wondering, "How long do they need this??" Positive Pairing is going to be key!

We use reinforcement throughout our lives (paychecks, praise from co-workers, etc).

Any time we are giving reinforcement, we should make the student FEEL good with our praise, high-fives, cheers, claps, ect. Depending on the learner, this can transfer to be reinforcing on it's own and the tangible reinforcer may no longer be needed!



## REMINDERS

- Give reinforcement immediately
- Use behavior specific praise
- Create opportunities for reinforcement
- Reinforcer needs to be age appropriate and meaningful to the learner
- Identify multiple reinforcers incase learner becomes tired of one
- Reinforcement is NOT contingent on work completion
- Think about behaviors you are wanting to DECREASE and reinforce everything else!



GET  
CONNECTED!



© PROJECT ACCESS - SEPTEMBER 2022 \*PROJECT ACCESS IS A COLLABORATION AMONG THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, AND MISSOURI'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS.