

The Skills for Success

What should toddlers know before pre-school?

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What is Successful Behavior?

We can define success as the ability to **independently access** reinforcing relationships, activities, items and settings. “Reinforcing” is another way to say things that are good, that we enjoy, that we find fun. We can identify several key **pivotal** behaviors that ensure a child’s ability to be successful. By “pivotal” we mean a behavior that has a widespread effect on the child’s life. For example, when we teach a noncompliant, defiant child to follow directions, he becomes more successful and therefore, happier in all aspects of his life. When you teach these basic essential skills, you will help your child be successful at home, at school and in the community.

The Skills for Success are:

1. Follow directions. (Do what you are asked right away)
2. Do your work. (Initiate, remain on task and finish your job.)
3. Keep hands and feet to yourself. (Do not hit, push, and kick other people)
4. Speak politely. (Use polite talk. Do not swear, ridicule or threaten others.)

“Research has shown that the most effective way to reduce problem behavior is to strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement rather than trying to weaken undesirable behavior using aversive or negative processes.”

Sidney W. Bijou, Ph.D.

Applied Behavior Analysis

Applied Behavior Analysis provides a scientific approach to the prediction and control of behavior. Science relies on direct, objective observation and measurement of phenomena, systematic arrangement of events, procedures to rule out alternative explanations for what

is observed and repeated demonstrations by individuals working independently of one another. Peer review makes science self critical and self-correcting.

Applied behavior analysis focuses on objectively defined, observable behavior of social significance. It seeks to improve behavior while showing a reliable relationship between the procedures employed and behavioral improvement. It uses the methods of science - description, quantification and analysis.

Thirty years of research demonstrated the efficacy of applied behavioral methods in reducing inappropriate behavior and in increasing communication, learning and appropriate social behavior.

The U.S. Surgeon General, 1999

The Basic Principles of Behavior

Applied Behavior Analysis is the *natural science of behavior*. Over 50 years of research provides several key principles that govern behavior. Understanding these principles is the basis of learning and positive behavior change.

- **Reinforcement** -- when something good follows a behavior, it causes the behavior to increase.
- **Punishment** -- when something bad follows the behavior, it causes the behavior to decrease.
- **Function** -- All behavior is functional -- it serves a purpose. Gain and escape are the two functions of behavior. If the behavior works – it is reinforcing. “It’s a good thing.” Remember, the behavior that works is the behavior that stays.
- **Extinction** -- If the behavior does not work, it will go away.
- **Rate of Reinforcement** -- The rate of learning is directly related to the rate of reinforcement. More reinforcement = More learning.
- **Behavioral Momentum** -- If a child successfully completes several easy tasks, it is more likely that he will complete a more difficult task. “Get the ball rolling.”
- **Deprivation and Satiation** -- Reinforcers become more powerful when access is withheld or limited (deprivation). Reinforcers become less powerful when the child has free access (satiation).

The Functions of Behavior

The basic functions of behavior are:

- To **gain** attention, access to items, activities and settings. This is also called **positive reinforcement**.
- To **escape** unpleasant settings, activities and events. This is also called **negative reinforcement**.
- To **gain or escape** the amount of sensory stimulation.

The best way to understand the function of behavior is to describe the behavior as a “gain behavior” or “escape behavior.” An example of a gain behavior is when Joe says; “I want to go outside” and receives permission to go outside. The function of Joe’s behavior is to gain access to the outside. An example of an escape behavior is when Tina is told to wash the dishes, she says, “I hate washing the dishes, I don’t want to do this.” The function of Tina’s behavior is to escape washing the dishes.

Sensory stimulation is the amount of stuff -- activity, noise, and social interaction -- that is going on around us. Sometimes we want more stuff going on around us. For example, when you come home to an empty house and turn on the television. Sometimes we want less noise.

Reinforcement and Punishment

Reinforcement is **anything** that **follows** a behavior that **increases** the probability that the behavior will happen again. **Punishment** is **anything** that **follows** a behavior that **decreases** the probability that the behavior will happen again.

Function and reinforcement is the same thing. If the **function** of Joe’s behavior is to gain access to a favorite toy. Gaining access to the toy **reinforces** the behavior.

Positive reinforcement is when the **function** of the behavior is to **gain** access to items, activities or social attention. **Negative** reinforcement is when the **function** of the behavior is to **escape** activities, settings, or social attention.

An example of positive reinforcement is turning on and off a light switch. If, when you turn on the switch, the light goes on, you will do the same thing the next time that you want the light to go on. This example shows how simple reinforcement can be. It’s important to get away from the idea that reinforcement is always some big item or activity. It’s simpler than that -- **if a certain behavior works, we will use it again**. This is the essence of function.

An example of negative reinforcement is when a child protests because another child is bothering him. The function of the protests is to escape the other child.

Reinforcement is only reinforcement when it works. Sometimes, we will arbitrarily decide that a specific item or activity to reward a child's behavior is a "reinforcer" Attention, items or activities that are given to a child after a behavior are only reinforcers if the specific behavior increases. If the behavior does not increase, the item, activity or attention is not reinforcing.

What Makes Reinforcement Effective?

Immediacy - How long does the child wait for the reinforcement?

The sooner the child receives the reinforcer after the desired behavior, the more effect the reinforcer will be in increasing the desired behavior. On the other hand, the longer the child must wait to receive a reinforcer following a behavior, the less effective the reinforcer will be. **Small reinforcers delivered immediately following a behavior are more effective than big reinforcers delivered long after a behavior.**

Frequency - How often does the child receive the reinforcement?

The rate of learning is tied to the rate of reinforcement. This is a very important behavioral principle. Have you ever wondered why kids can learn very complex video games and seem to effortlessly manipulate the controllers to do very difficult things? A video game reinforces a child at a rate greater than once a second - it is this high rate of reinforcement that allows the child to quickly learn very complex, difficult behaviors.

Effort - How hard is it for the child to receive the reinforcement?

Sometimes, we make it difficult for a child to receive reinforcement and then wonder why they continue to perform the problem behavior. For example, we want to teach Sally to say, "May I have get drink, please?" instead of whining when she is thirsty. Initially, we need to give Sally the opportunity to get a drink every time she says, "May I have get drink, please?" If the new behavior (asking "May I have get drink, please?") is more difficult than the old behavior (whining) then Sally will continue to use the old behavior. This is also known as **Behavioral Efficiency**. We perform those behaviors that are most efficient is serving their function.

The 3 Ways to Change Behavior

A big mistake that we make is only providing consequences for behavior. We assume that the child knows what to do and we wait for the behavior to occur and then decide to praise or punish. Why don't we teach behavior in the same manner that we teach people other skills, such as, math, science, or spelling? We don't assume that a child knows how to correctly spell every word and wait for him to choose to spell a word correctly. Positive behaviors are skills that should be taught the same way that we teach academic skills. Instead of merely giving consequences following behavior, a comprehensive, three-step approach is more far effective.

The 3 ways to change behavior are:

1. Modify the environment. (Set the stage for success)

We modify the environment by changing the time, place, sequence and social context in which activities are performed. For example; Joe has difficulty staying on task to complete his homework. His parent decides to change Joe's schedule so he gets access to a video game as soon as he completes his homework.

2. Train new behaviors. (The right way to get what you want)

Behavior problems are skill deficits. We can determine the function of the problem behavior and teach the child a new behavior that serves the same function. For example, John pushes Mary out of a chair in order to sit on it. We would teach John the expression; "May I sit there?" and reinforce him for using this expression by gaining access to the chair.

3. Provide contingencies. (What's the pay-off for the behavior?)

There are three types of contingencies:

- **Reinforcement** -something that increases the probability that the behavior will occur again.
- **Punishment** - something that decreases the probability that the behavior will occur again.
- **Extinction** - the behavior will decrease in frequency if it is no longer reinforced. Remember, when a behavior serves its function, it is reinforced. If John is given access to the chair when he says; "May I sit there?" he will use the expression, "May I sit there?" again to gain access to the chair. If John does not receive access to the chair when he pushes Mary off, he will push Mary off the chair less often. Saying, "May I sit

there?” becomes functional, pushing Mary off the chair becomes nonfunctional.

Organization & Scheduling is Critical!

- ✓ Establish a consistent routine with an assigned time and place for each activity. **“Routine = Cooperation.”**
- ✓ Use a **Big Visual Schedule** of the daily activities. This will help the child understand the sequence of events and increase compliance with directions.
- ✓ Follow the detailed daily schedule and routine everyday. **“Establish a predictable routine.”**
- ✓ Organize and plan the day to minimize down time. **“Unstructured time = behavior problems.”**
- ✓ Make sure that low preference tasks take place before high preference activities. **“First you work, and then you play.”**
- ✓ Break down tasks into small, easily understood steps. **“The light at the end of the tunnel.”**
- ✓ The full completion of the task is necessary before the child proceeds to the next activity. **“A must be completed before we go to B.”**

Shaping Successful Behavior

Shaping is the reinforcement of successive approximations of the desired behavior. The goal is achieved by reinforcing small steps toward the final response.

Good teaching usually involves the principles of shaping.

Successive Approximations – Reinforce any intermediate behavior that is a prerequisite component of a more complex behavior.

Steps to Shaping

1. Identify the final desired behavior.
2. Choose a starting behavior.
3. Choose shaping steps - small steps, slow pace, if you don't succeed go back to an earlier successful step.

An Example of Shaping

Target Behavior:	Get dressed by self.
Step One:	Put on pants by self. Mom helps with shirt, socks and shoes.
Step Two:	Put on pants and shirt by self. Mom helps with socks and shoes.
Step Three:	Put on pants, shirt and socks. Mom helps with shoes.
Step Four:	Put on pants, shirt socks and shoes by self.

The shaping process can be enhanced by using prompts. Prompts are verbal or physical signals that direct a child to perform a specific behavior.

A Good Prompt is ...

- Understandable to the child
- Clear and specific as to the behavior that the child is to perform
- Broken down into easy steps
- Delivered in a pleasant and calm manner
- Faded to phase out verbal direction.

Prompt Dependency is when a child will only perform the behavior when he or she is given one or more prompts. Example: Joe will only put his toys away when his mother tells him to.

It is important to develop schedules that replace verbal prompts as the signals when a behavior is to be performed. Example: Joe will put his toys away before he goes out for morning recess. “A must be complete before we proceed to B.”

Count to 10 between prompts. Research shows that waiting between prompts increases the likelihood that the child will comply.

Remember that compliance is a learned behavior. Be sure to reinforce with praise and access to preferred activities when individuals are following directions. Also, be sure to reinforce your child for following their schedule.

Teach your child “The right way to get what you want”

There is nothing wrong with the function of problem behaviors. We all want to gain attention, escape work and gain access to things that we like. It’s how we go about it. One of the best ways to change behavior is to replace the problem behavior with a skill that serves the same purpose. For example, Tom sees Sarah sitting in his chair. Tom screams; “Get out of my chair!” We do two things; 1) we teach Tom the expression; “That’s my

seat, Sarah. Could you sit somewhere else?” 2) We make sure that Tom does not get to sit in his chair when he screams at Sarah. This way, the problem behavior becomes nonfunctional - behaviors that don't work go away.

Train Cooperative Behavior

“Cooperation is a Pivotal behavior.” Cooperation is defined as following instructions, directions and rules. Cooperative people are more successful and happier than uncooperative people.

Set up frequent opportunities for cooperation throughout the day.

To teach individuals cooperative behavior, use the following sequence:

1. Give the child a directive; “Sam, please bring me the book on the counter.”
2. The child does what he is asked.
3. The child receives immediate praise and reinforcement; “Thanks, Sam. Would you like some apple juice?”

Teaching how to “Ask and Wait”

As children learn how to ask for things - they must also learn that most things cannot be delivered immediately. The following is a simple procedure to teach your child how to tolerate delay of gratification.

- The child requests an item or activity.
- The child is asked to complete a brief task with the promise that the item or activity will be given afterward.
- When the task is completed, the child makes the request again.
- The parent acknowledges that the task has been satisfactorily completed and delivers the requested item or activity.

The essential part of teaching delay of gratification is to start small. Give the child a very simple task to complete prior to granting his request. Over time, gradually increase the size and complexity of the task, while reinforcing the child for staying on task and following directions. It is very important that the child be prevented from having access to items and settings without first getting the parent's permission.

Correspondence “Say - Do” Training

Correspondence or “Say - Do” Training is an effective intervention that can reduce undesirable behaviors and increase appropriate social functioning. The child will first verbalize the appropriate behaviors he is expected to perform, perform the behaviors for a specified period of time and then, receive both praise and reinforcement from the trainer for performing those behaviors.

Here’s an example of correspondence training. Prior to going to the store, the parent says “Do you remember the rules when we go to the store?” The child replies “Stay with Mom and follow directions.” The parent says “Great! If you do that, you will get to watch *Itchy and Scratchy* when we get home.”

Incidental Teaching

Incidental teaching involves teaching functional language within a natural context. It requires interaction between an adult and a child in the natural environment - such as free play, self-care or meal preparation. It does not occur in a formal training session.

Take advantage of events that occur in the everyday environment, such as a child requesting assistance or information.

The child initiates the incidental teaching situation with a request. The parent responds by setting up a learning situation.

Goal of incidental teaching is for children to learn through naturally occurring opportunities.

Think of ways to elicit communication in the child’s daily schedule and activities. Rather than providing language training only in a one-on-one structured setting, view all activities as language based.

Finding Powerful Reinforcement

There are 4 Kinds of Reinforcers

- **Social.** Praise, hugs, visiting a friend, and fun time with a parent.
- **Items.** Preferred toys, books, chairs and clothing.

- **Activities.** Inside individual activities, such as reading, playing a video game, listening to music. Inside social activities, such as playing a board game. Outside individual activities, such as riding a tricycle. Outside social activities, such as playing with other children.
- **Settings.** Favorite places to be, such as going to a park or the museum.

Schedules of Reinforcement

Differential Reinforcement of Other Behavior (DRO). Reinforcing the child for periods of time that the problem behavior did not occur. Example: Arthur received praise and a star on his chart for every fifteen minutes that he did not scream.

Differential Reinforcement of Alternative Behavior (DRA). Reinforcing the child for performing an alternative behavior that replaces the problem behavior. Example: Beth received praise and a star on her chart every time she asked and waited for the other student to give her the ball, instead of grabbing. Asking and waiting is an alternative or replacement behavior to grabbing.

Noncontingent Reinforcement (NCR). The child is given access to a reinforcing item, activity or setting that was the function of the problem behavior on a fixed interval. Example: Casey would scream and tantrum in order to gain his mother's attention. His mother would provide attention to Casey every 10 minutes, regardless of Casey's behavior.

Extinction. Behaviors that no longer serve their function, or are no longer reinforced, will become extinct. It is very important that problem behaviors, such as aggression and tantrums are not accidentally reinforced. When the child displays problem behaviors, make sure that he does not gain access to the attention, item or activity that he desires. When the child performs the desirable, alternative behavior, (appropriately requesting the item) he should be immediately reinforced.