

# Guidelines for Reinforcement

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will explore guidelines for reinforcement by defining and discussing the following:

1. Reserve Items Specifically for Reinforcement
2. Conduct Frequent Preference Assessments
3. Deliver Reinforcement Immediately
4. Items Should Be Easy to Administer and Remove
5. Vary the Reinforcement
6. Establish Conditioned (Learned) Reinforcers
7. Reinforce Desired Behaviors



## BIG IDEA

As you have previously learned, reinforcement occurs when a behavior is followed by a consequence that results in an increase in future behavior. Basically, if we like what happens after we do something, we are likely to repeat what we did in the future.

We need to follow a specific set of guidelines for reinforcement when working with our patients. They can help us make sure reinforcement is effective and our sessions go well. We will discuss each of these guidelines, as well as the right way and wrong way to implement each guideline.

## 1. Reserve Items Specifically for Reinforcement

This guideline advises we avoid giving free access to the patient. Free access to reinforcement decreases its potency. Also, make delivery of the reinforcer contingent on the target behavior.

Wrong Way	Right Way
Playing the computer is one of Carrie's favorite things to do. She is allowed to play on the computer whenever she has free time. At the same time, behavior technicians are reporting that they are having trouble finding items to use as reinforcers in session.	Carrie is allowed to play on the computer for one minute following five correct responses in a program. She is not allowed to play on the computer if she has not earned it as a reinforcer.

If the patient has free access to preferred items all day, those items will lose some of their effectiveness as reinforcers.

## Video Transcription

What should we play?

Tozzle.

Tozzle? Well, Tozzle's for brushing your teeth. Do you want to brush your teeth?

[INAUDIBLE] teeth.

Tozzles is a game on his iPod that he only gets when he brushes his teeth. Say mommy, I want Tozzle.

You want Tozzle? Can you do that? Do that. 1, 2, 3. Yay! Good job.

Yay, [INAUDIBLE].

Good job.

You get Tozzle. That was pretty good.

## 2. Conduct Frequent Preference Assessments

Conducting frequent preference assessments helps us adjust the reinforcers that we use to changes in a patient's motivation. This way we ensure that the reinforcers we are using are the most effective ones available.

➦ **EXAMPLE** A patient might say they do not like gummies, but after seeing their friends eating them often and trying them a few times, they change their mind and decide that they do like them. We might not know this if we did not conduct frequent preference assessments.

To conduct a preference assessment, present several items in an array, have the patient select items, and then re-present unselected items in the array. Continue until the patient stops selecting. The first couple of items chosen are most preferred.

Preference assessments should be conducted at the start of each program and when the patient loses interest.

These assessments are important because we cannot teach without effective reinforcers. Establishing operations, or EOs, change over time, thus preferences change during your session.

## Video Transcription

Give me five. Awesome. What do you want to work for? Do you want candy, or do you want toys?

Candy!

Candy. That's a good choice. Do you want M&Ms or Skittles?

Skittles!

Skittles. Do you want Skittles or gummy bears? ?

Gummy bears!

Oooh, that's a good choice.

Ethan, No, sir, try again. Ethan, do you want to toys or can--

All right Tucker, are you ready, buddy?

No.

It's your turn again. Tucker, do you want to work for the pom-pom or for candy?

Pom-pom. Candy!

I love how excited your are about that. Do you want Skittles or gummy bears? Try again. Skittles or candy bears?

Skittles.

Skittles.

OK. Ethan, I need you to sit down, please. Thank you very much, buddy.

### 3. Deliver Reinforcement Immediately

You should deliver the reinforcement immediately, that is, within half a second of the response. This is important because we want to make sure that we are reinforcing the behavior that just occurred. If we wait too long, we may be reinforcing another behavior. The longer the delay to reinforcement, the less the reinforcement works.

➦ **EXAMPLE** The timer goes off and your patient earns access to the computer. You are busy collecting data and wait 30 seconds before delivering the access. In that time, the patient starts throwing the timer and materials because they want their break. When you allow the break late, you might inadvertently be reinforcing throwing objects to gain access to tangibles.

Wrong Way	Right Way
Shantal presents the direction, "Who is it?" while showing Thom a	Thom correctly responds, "Doctor,"

picture of a doctor. Thom correctly responds, “Doctor.” Shantal then leans over to open a bag of chips. After 10 seconds she gets the bag open and gives Thom a chip.	and Shantal already has the bag of chips open and ready and she hands Thom a chip immediately.
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Reinforcement is only effective if presented immediately following the response.

### Video Transcription

OK. Give me the pizza.

Oh my goodness! You did such a good job!

[TICKLING NOISES]

[LAUGHTER]

[TICKLING NOISES]

## 4. Items Should Be Easy to Administer and Remove

Items should be easy to administer and remove. If the reinforcer is something that takes a long time to deliver, set up, take down, etc., then we might be wasting time and delaying work or reinforcement.

➦ **EXAMPLE** The patient wants to play a game that has multiple pieces and takes a long time to set up. While you are setting up the game, they get bored and begin engaging in a challenging behavior.

## 5. Vary the Reinforcement

It can be important to vary the reinforcement to avoid boredom and satiation. The patient might get tired of the same thing all of the time – wouldn’t you? They might also get full if they are always earning edible reinforcers.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You always use hot chips as a reinforcer for your patient. The patient recently ate lunch, has already had several hot chips, and is no longer willing to work to earn them.

Wrong Way	Right Way
Winston’s behavior technician gives him a gummy bear as a reinforcer following a correct response. It takes Winston one minute to eat the gummy bear.	Winston’s behavior technician gives Winston a less chewy edible reinforcer following a correct response. Winston chews and swallows the edible in less than 10 seconds and the behavior technician starts the next trial.

If the reinforcer is a toy that takes a long time to play with, the patient may engage in a tantrum when you remove the toy to start the next trial. Teaching time will be lost because now you have to manage the tantrum.

## Video Transcription

Watch me. Do this.

[EXCLAIMS]

That was so smart. Look at you, mister man.

Do you want back scratches?

Yeah.

Back scratches.

[EXCLAIMS]

OK, ready? Do this. That was so smart. You did it. You did it.

[BLOWS RASPBERRIES]

OK, here we go. Do this. Nice job, give me ten.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. You did it!

[LAUGHTER]

I did it.

Do this.

[GENTLE POUNDING]

Good job. Do you want to do it again?

Yeah.

[BLOWS RASPBERRIES]

[LAUGHTER]

[BLOWS RASPBERRIES]

[LAUGHTER]

I got a surprise for you. You want to see it?

Yeah.

OK, come here, I'll show you, I'm going to show you. We've got something cool to play with.

Do you what this is?

Yeah. It's squishy.

Squishy.

Yeah! Do you want to play with it?

Yeah.

OK.

Which one do you want? OK.

[BLOWS RASPBERRIES]

[LAUGHTER]

[BLOWS RASPBERRIES]

[LAUGHTER]

[BLOWS RASPBERRIES]

I got you!

Do it again.

You want to do it again? OK, come here. Give me your legs. Ready?

[BLOWS RASPBERRIES]

[LAUGHTER]

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## 6. Establish Conditioned (Learned) Reinforcers

Always pair primary reinforcers, or unconditioned reinforcers (things needed for survival like food, water, shelter, oxygen, etc.) with secondary reinforcers, or conditioned reinforcers (things that you find reinforcing after experience and learning, like toys, activities, money, social praise, free time, etc.) to promote fading. Fading is a process used in ABA to slowly reduce access to or the amount of something

➦ **EXAMPLE** Pair the delivery of cheese crackers with verbal praise (“nice work!”). Eventually, you will not need to give a cheese cracker for every response and instead can just give enthusiastic verbal praise or a high five.

The way to establish conditioned reinforcers is to pair neutral stimuli (e.g., praise) with effective forms of reinforcement (e.g., yoga ball).

➦ **EXAMPLE** Bouncing on a big ball is an effective reinforcer for Latrice. So, you present the direction, “Clap,” a new task, and Latrice responds correctly. As you bounce Latrice on the ball, you provide her social praise such as “Nice work” and “Good job.”

We do this because, often, when our patients start therapy, social praise and smiles are not preferred. Social interaction begins to function as a reinforcement over time.

### Video Transcription

What's your mom's name?

Sheryl.

Sheryl! Very good!

Whoops!

Whoops.

There you go. Put another on on there. Where does the K go? Good job.

What does it say? Jack? Say, "Rrrr"--

Riley.

Riley! There you go. All done!

Here you go. Mmmmm. Say, "It's good."

It's good.

OK. Go play. I'll see you later.

## 7. Reinforce Desired Behaviors

Throughout the day, reinforce desired behaviors. Not only are we reinforcing the target behavior in the moment, but all desired and appropriate behaviors a patient engages in throughout a session.

Wrong Way

Right Way

<p>Jodi has been in treatment for approximately three months and has learned to respond to simple compliance instructions such as, “Come here.” Jodi’s behavior technician says, “Come here,” and Jodi comes over immediately. The behavior technician says, “Good,” but does not provide any other reinforcer (and social praise alone is not a strong reinforcer for this patient). The behavior technician then says, “Sit down,” and Jodi immediately sits down. Again, the behavior technician does not provide any tangible reinforcer.</p>	<p>Jodi’s behavior technician says, “Come here,” and Jodi comes over immediately. The behavior technician throws Jodi in the air (which is often an effective reinforcer for Jodi) and then starts working with Jodi.</p>
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Every minute of a session is an opportunity to reinforce (and thereby increase) appropriate behavior such as sitting nicely, etc.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Which behaviors do you think we should reinforce?

If your patient passes another student on the playground and says “Hi,” you should deliver positive praise for appropriate greetings.



### TRY IT

For a 2-hour period of your day in which it is “free-time” (not at work or doing homework), write down information regarding what type of reinforcement you accessed (for instance, did you eat pizza, drink beer, talk to friends, watch a movie, play a game on your phone, etc). After you have a list of at least 10 items, identify which of those items would be primary reinforcers and which items would be secondary.

## Video Transcription

All right, Aidan. You got a point for using kind words.

All right. So this one--



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **general guidelines for reinforcement**:

1. Reserve items specifically for reinforcement.
2. Conduct frequent preference assessments.
3. Deliver reinforcement immediately following the response, within half a second.
4. Choose items that are easy to administer and remove.
5. Vary the reinforcement to avoid boredom and satiation.
6. Establish conditioned (learned) reinforcers.
7. Reinforce desired behaviors throughout the day.