Shaping New Behaviors

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Common Problems Parents Face

- My child does not have the skills to perform a specific task.
- My child has the skill, but he does not perform the task.
- My child cannot tolerate certain elements of the task (e.g. visit to the dentist).
- My child will not follow directions.
Key Concept Of Shaping Behavior

Reinforcement

- What is it?
- What exactly does it do?
- How often does it occur?
- How do we present it?
- Why is it so IMPORTANT?
Why We Should Use Positive Reinforcement

- Simple to learn and use
- Helps your child feel good about him or herself
- Builds a positive relationship between you and your child
- Creates a positive environment
Behavioral Teaching Strategies

Cycle of Instruction

Instruction ➔ Response ➔ Consequence

Reinforce as quickly as possible to strengthen the desired behavior

Example

Instruction: Stand Up ➔ Response: Child Stands Up ➔ Consequence: Take a break
Decide on a target.

Reduce a complex skill (behavior) into smaller elements.

Use prompts and prompt fading to teach individual elements.

Use reinforcement to strengthen the new skill.
Teaching Procedures

- Imitation Training
- Shaping
- Differential Reinforcement
- Prompts
Assessing prerequisite skills is necessary prior to using any procedure.

The goal of imitation training is to teach children to do what the person providing the model does.

To use this technique, the child must have an imitative repertoire.

Example:

Can my child remain seated?
Can my child look at me?
Can my child look at objects?
Can my child keep his hands in his lap?

Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2007
Guidelines For Imitation Training

- Keep the teaching active and brief.
- Reward both prompted and imitative responses.
- Pair verbal praise and attention with a tangible reward.
- If your child’s progress breaks down, back up, and move ahead slowly.
- Remember to fade out verbal and physical prompts.
- Stop imitation training when your child consistently imitates others.

Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2007
Imitation Training Example

**Parent says, “do this.”**

**Child imitates.**

**Parent says, “awesome” and gives a tangible reward.**
Definition of Shaping

- Shaping is the reinforcement of successive approximations of a target behavior.

- Shaping is a way of adding a new behavior to a child’s repertoire.

- Shaping is used when the target behavior does not exist.

- In shaping, you are rewarding any behavior that is a closer approximation of the target behavior than the behavior you rewarded last.

Cooper, Heron & Heward, 2007
Shaping shares certain features of the game “hot & cold.”

In playing “hot & cold,” you reward any movement that takes the child closer to the prize. Each of those successive movements is a closer approximation of the desired behavior. If the prize is under the couch, and the child is moving toward the couch, every time the child takes a step toward the couch you are yelling, “hotter,” and you are rewarding the behavior. If the child moves away from the couch, you would yell, “colder” (non-rewarding).

Morgan, 1974
Shaping Behaviors

- Differential reinforcement rewards only the appropriate responses and discontinues rewards for all other responses.

- The basic principle of differential reinforcement is discrimination.

Example:

Reward your child for cleaning his or her room before bedtime, and withhold the reward when your child does not clean his or her room.

Cooper, Heron & Heward, 2007
Successive Approximations

- Shaping begins with rewarding responses that will lead to the target behavior.
- If a new approximation to the target behavior does not occur, you reward the last approximation again.
- If an approximation is repeated and rewarded three times, you can withhold the reward the next time that behavior appears.
- If no new approximation to the target behavior appears, you have to go back to a previously rewarded behavior.
The Shaping Process

- Shaping can be similar to helping your child up a staircase.

- Every so often, progress is effortless and goes quickly; other times it is slow and difficult.

- At times, your child may leap over the next step; then, he may turn and go down the stairs a few steps, and you have to help him up those same steps again.

BBB Autism, 2002
Steps Of A Shaping Process

Step 1 • Select the target behavior.

Step 2 • Select the initial behavior that your child currently performs and that resembles the target behavior in some way.

Step 3 • Select powerful rewards with which to reinforce the initial behavior, the successive approximations of the target behavior, and the target behavior.

Step 4 • Reward the initial behavior until it occurs frequently.

Step 5 • Reward successive approximations of the target behavior each time they occur.

Step 6 • Reward the target behavior each time it occurs.

Step 7 • Reinforce the target behavior on an intermittent schedule of reinforcement.
Shaping To Teach Wearing Glasses

Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2007
Kai tantrums every time he is asked to write his spelling words.

Step 1: Kai will write his name at the top of the spelling worksheet.

Step 2: Kai will write one spelling word of his choice.

Step 3: Kai will write three spelling words of his choice.

Step 4: Kai will write either all of the odd numbered words or all even numbered words.

Step 5: Kai will write all spelling words except one.

Step 6: Kai will write all spelling words.
Guidelines For Using Shaping

- Identify the first behavior to reward.
- Proceed in small steps.
- Set a limit of approximations that will be rewarded at each level.
- Continue to reward until you reach the target behavior.

Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2007
Teaching New Skills Using Prompts

Why prompts are an important part of teaching new skills.

- The function of a prompt is to produce the occurrence of a behavior, so it may be reinforced.
- They help children perform a correct response, so that the behavior can be reinforced and strengthened.
- Prompts make teaching more efficient.
- Prompts increase the chances that a correct response will occur.
The Three Common Response Prompts

Verbal Instruction
- Vocal verbal instruction
- Non verbal instruction

Modeling
- Demonstrate the desired behavior
- Easy and practical to use

Physical Guidance
- Is effective but intrusive
- Requires direct physical involvement between parent and child

Least to Most

Most to Least

Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2007
Target behavior: Saying thank you

Verbal instruction: And what do you say?
Modeling Prompt

Target Behavior: Raise arms

Model: Parent raises arms to show the child
Target Behavior: Tying shoe

Physical: Guide them using hand-over-hand
Effective prompting

- Effective prompts focus the child’s attention to the instruction.
- They should be as weak as possible.
- Remove as quickly as possible.
Helping Your Child Achieve His Or Her Potential

- Create opportunities in the environment for the behavior you want to occur.
- Do not set expectations too high.
- Use things your child enjoys as rewards.
- Allow choices when possible.
- Be consistent.

