



Tips for Home or School Guidelines for Using Reinforcers

By: MaryAnn Demchak



1. What is Positive Reinforcement: The presentation of something contingent on the occurrence of a behavior that increases the future rates of that behavior.
Example: John uses his picture card to request an apple. John receives a slice of apple.
2. What is Negative Reinforcement: The removal of something contingent on the occurrence of a behavior that increases the future rates of that behavior.
Example: John uses his picture card to request a break from the activity. John receives a break from the activity. (The activity is removed.)
3. Be careful in choosing reinforcers, not all perceived reinforcers serve as true reinforcers. That is, if the behavior targeted to be reinforced does not increase, then the item you attempted to use as a reinforcer did not actually function as a reinforcer. It will be necessary to choose something else to try as a reinforcer.
4. Try to choose reinforcers that are as natural as possible.
5. Reinforcers may change over time. Things that serve as a reinforcer today, may not serve as a reinforcer tomorrow.
6. Reinforcers must be given contingent on the occurrence of a behavior. The individual will begin to associate the behavior with the reinforcer.
7. Reinforcers should be given consistently and immediately.
8. After a behavior is established, reinforcement should be decreased. Instead of reinforcing an individual for every occurrence of the behavior, decrease reinforcement to every other occurrence. Then move to every third occurrence. Continue to decrease the rate of reinforcement until the behavior is under the individual's control and only naturally occurring reinforcers are available.

