

## PAIRING WITH REINFORCEMENT

### Definitions:

- A positive reinforcer is any stimulus (attention, food item, toy/object, activity, etc.) that when presented (added into environment) immediately following a behavior, increases the future frequency of that behavior.
- A primary reinforcer is any stimulus that when presented immediately following a behavior, increases the future frequency of that behavior due to its biological importance (unconditioned or unlearned).
- A secondary reinforcer is a neutral or aversive stimulus that acquires its reinforcing effect because it has been paired with a primary or previously conditioned secondary reinforcer (conditioned or learned).

### Rationale:

- Students that have numerous and varied reinforcers have a better long-term prognosis both socially and in terms of overall skill acquisition.

### Guidelines:

- Identify the student's positive reinforcers through observation, assessment inventories (included in manual), and/or conducting formal preference assessment probes.
- "Sanitize" the environment so the most valuable items/activities (positive reinforcers) are only made available by the staff. Less preferred items/activities should also be put away so they cannot "compete" with the highly preferred items/activities that the staff is providing.
- Provide hundreds of opportunities for staff to deliver positive reinforcers, preferably by using items that have many pieces (ex. puzzles), or can be delivered in small quantities (ex. cookie broken into pieces). This establishes staff members as "givers" because they are continually adding more reinforcement into the student's environment (conditioned reinforcers).
- If a student's reinforcers cannot be delivered in small quantities, have a duplicate of the item so staff can avoid tug-of-war situations. That may result in staff being seen as "takers" (conditioned aversives).
- It may be necessary to fade in eye contact, voice, and physical proximity. Initially, say the name of the reinforcer as it is delivered. Gradually increase commenting by narrating what the student is doing and using the student's name.
- Try to create novel ways to interact with the reinforcer so its value is increased by staff involvement in the activity.
- Be mindful of the value altering effects of satiation and deprivation on a reinforcer. Specifically, offer a new reinforcer when the student's interest in the current item/activity weakens (motivating operations).
- Require only routine contingencies at this stage (ex. sitting at a table while eating or remaining in the play area with toys).
- Although the likelihood of maladaptive behaviors occurring is low, never reinforce an inappropriate behavior.
- There is not a specified time frame for the completion of this pairing process. Consider staff conditioned reinforcers when the student readily approaches them and willingly remains engaged with them for a period of time.

**Note: In the above guidelines, a staff member is being conditioned as a reinforcer. The same process may be used to condition peers, environments, items and/or activities as reinforcers.**