

# Reinforcement Based Classroom Culture

Verbal Behavior Associates



# Who we are

- ▶ We are a passionate group of dedicated professionals who believe that children with behavioral and language difficulties can be taught skills to lead independent, fulfilling, and happy lives.



# Description of Today's Training

- ▶ Equips educators to respond to problem behavior with confidence—without relying on punitive measures.
- ▶ Grounded in ABA: learn to catch students doing the right thing, teach coping/replacement skills, and build reinforcement-rich environments.
- ▶ Views behavior deficits as teachable skills, strengthening regulation, resilience, and student mental health.



# Socially Appropriate Behaviors in the Classroom

## Natural Motivation

Many students are motivated to perform and succeed in school simply by the natural consequences in school and their home environment.

- ▶ They are “intrinsically motivated” to do well.
- ▶ Parents set up contingencies early on (ex: happy for good report card).



The desire to please adults and be accepted by peers shapes children to learn to like school and extracurricular activities.



## Regular Contingencies

Some children only require the “regular” contingencies of school to behave in a desirable way, or to perform to a certain level.

- ▶ Regular contingencies include: teacher praise, peer approval/acceptance, good grades.



# Why Students Engage in Problem Behavior

There are some populations of students who require a more synthetic reinforcement system in order to learn appropriate school behaviors.



- Home environment does not provide natural reinforcers.



- Acceptance from peers is gained by emitting undesirable behavior.



- A child is not reinforced by others at all.



- The child has learning difficulties.



- The child has learned to gain attention from others by emitting undesirable behaviors.



- The child has learned to escape tasks by emitting undesirable behaviors.



- The child is "self-directed," or emits control and power struggle issues with adults.

# Questions that Help Understand the Challenging Behaviors



What is the history of the behavior?



When is the student most successful? What are the student's strengths? When are they being reinforced?

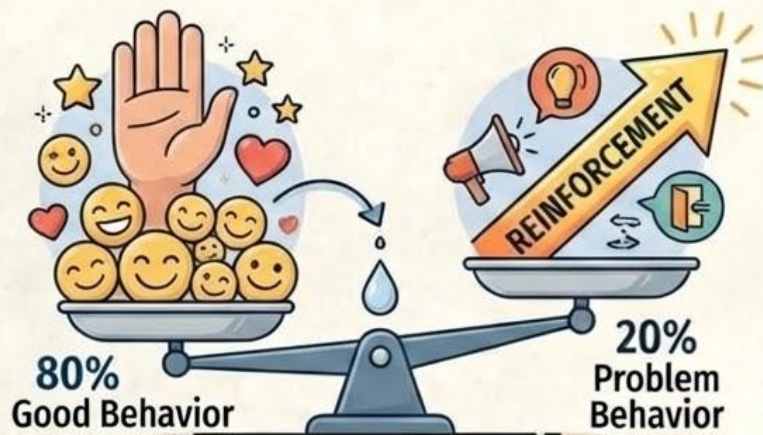


Is the curriculum a good match to student's skill level? (e.g., engaging and meaningful to the student)



**Remember, all behaviors occurs for a reason:** those reasons are an individual's way of communicating their desire to change environment in some way.

# THE REINFORCEMENT IMBALANCE



**“We are not great reinforcers, we don’t do it naturally. We think good behaviors should just occur. We end up with students who do not get reinforced for the 80% of the time they are behaving. But, they do get reinforced for the 20% of the time when the behavior occurs. Don’t reinforce the bad stuff, reinforce the good behavior!”**

Paul Dores

# Reinforcement

Reinforcement is the most important principle of behavior, and critical to ABA. Reinforcement is a consequence that leads to an **increase** in the behavior in the future.



## Positive Reinforcement

Occurs when a behavior is followed immediately by the **presentation of a stimulus**, which increases the future frequency of the behavior (i.e., the behavior is more likely to occur in the future)



**Example:** When a teacher praises a child's independent work skills, and the child emits increased independent work skills in the future, the presentation of praise is considered **positive reinforcement**



## Negative Reinforcement

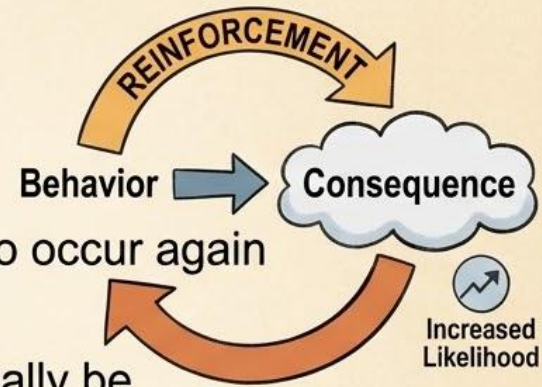
Occurs when a behavior is followed **immediately by the removal of a stimulus**, which increases the future frequency of the behavior





**Example:** The garbage is making the kitchen smell bad. You take the garbage outside. The kitchen no longer smells bad. You are more likely to take the smelly garbage outside in the future (the removal of the garbage/smell increases the behavior of taking the garbage outside)

# The Power of Consequences


- ▶ Responses that follow a behavior and make it more likely to occur again are reinforcing the problem behavior
- ▶ Some consequences we view as “punishments” could actually be reinforcing for the students.



- ▶ Missing Recess student is able to escape social interactions 
- ▶ iPad being taken away- student receives attention and may not care about the iPad
- ▶ Sitting alone in the corner- student does not have to share toys 
- ▶ Making the teacher yell or say “No”- student receives attention



**iPad Taken Away**

 **Receives Attention**  
(may not care about iPad)



**Sitting Alone in Corner**

 **Does Not Have to Share Toys**



**Making Teacher Yell or Say “No”**

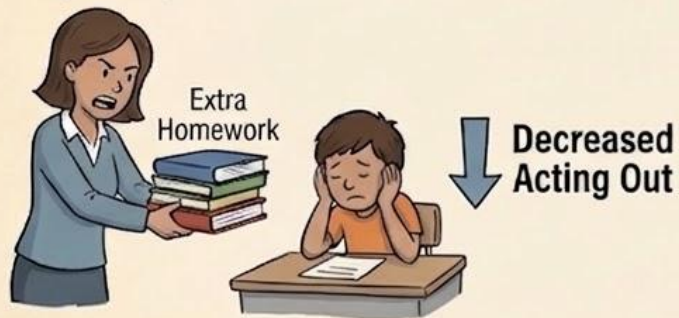
 **Receives Attention**

# Punishment ↓

**Punishment** is a consequence that leads to a **decrease** in the behavior in the future.

## + Positive Punishment

Occurs when a behavior is followed immediately by the **presentation** of a stimulus, which **decreases** future frequency of the behavior



Example: A student acts out in class. You give him extra homework. His acting out in class behavior decreases in the future.

## - Negative Punishment

Occurs when a behavior is followed immediately by the **removal** of a stimulus, which **decreases** future frequency of the behavior



Example: A student acts out in class. You take away his recess time. His acting out in class behavior decreases in the future.

# *Punishment should only be used as a last resort*

Punishment is only considered when less intrusive strategies have been tried and failed, and when it is supported by thorough data and ethical oversight. Therefore, punishment procedures need to be documented in a behavioral implementation plan & staff needs to be trained prior to utilizing.



## Risks of Negative Outcomes



Fear, aggression, or avoidance behaviors



Loss of rapport and trust with a client



Lack of Skill Building



Lying, cheating or sneaky behaviors

# Effective Classroom Management Includes:



Structuring the classroom environment



Actively supervising student engagement



Implementing classroom rules and routines



Enacting procedures that encourages appropriate behavior



Using behavior reduction strategies



Collecting and using data to monitor student behavior, and modifying classroom management procedures as needed

# The ABCs of Effective Classroom Management

## A. Antecedent Strategies



Adjustment to the environment that reduce the likelihood of problem behavior occurring.

Set up classroom to prevent certain behaviors.

## B. Target Replacement Behaviors



Teaching acceptable behaviors.  
Identify replacement skills and independence skills to teach.

## C. Consequence Strategies



What to do when behavior occurs.

Have a plan to reinforce desired behaviors and replacement skills and withholding reinforcement following problem behaviors.

# Effective Antecedent Strategies

Adjusting the environment to reduce the likelihood of behaviors



Providing clear expectations



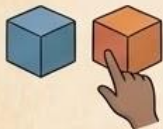
Utilizing Behavior Momentum



Utilizing visual supports



Priming the student  
(front loading)



Offering choices



Arranging the environment



Modifying the difficulty  
of the task



Utilizing transition warnings



Providing non-contingent  
reinforcement



Teaching replacement  
behaviors

# ***Teaching replacement behaviors***

Based on the function of the behavior, we must teach acceptable, prosocial behaviors that meet the same need/function

## **PROBLEM BEHAVIOR** (Skill Deficit)



Often due to a skill deficit in the student's repertoire.



## **REPLACEMENT BEHAVIOR** (Communication Response)



Teaching a communication response to get needs met in a more appropriate way.

# Teaching Replacement Behavior When Function of behavior is to gain **Access**

## Requesting



Requesting for access to preferred items/activities

## Relinquishing



Relinquishing preferred items and activities

## Waiting



Waiting for preferred items/activities

## Tolerating Denied Access



Tolerating denied access to preferred items/activities

# Teaching Replacement Behavior When Function of problem behavior is **Escape From Demand**

## Requesting Alternatives



Requesting for alternative assignments

## Positive Reinforcement for Compliance



Increasing compliance with adult directives through positive reinforcement

## Reinforce Staying On-Task



Reinforce staying on-task

## Systematic Task Completion



Task completion - move from more preferred tasks to non-preferred tasks gradually and systematically

# Teaching Replacement Behavior When Function of problem behavior is **recruiting Attention**

## Recruiting attention from others



Appropriately seeking attention from adults or peers

## Conversing with others



Engaging in back-and-forth conversation

## Initiating and responding to interaction



Starting and responding to social greetings and cues

## Social games



Participating in cooperative games and activities

# Teaching Replacement Behavior When Function of problem behavior is **Automatic**

## Expand leisure skills



Increasing the range of appropriate and enjoyable leisure activities

## Teach incompatible behavior



Teaching behaviors that physically prevent the problem behavior from occurring

# Consequence Strategies- what to do when challenging behaviors occur

## 1. Reduce reinforcement for problem behavior



Goal is to significantly reduce the amount of reinforcement the student receives for engaging in that problem behavior

## 2. Consequences depend on function

Attention function

Escape function



Consequences will depend on the function of the behavior

## 3. Reinforce replacement behaviors



Aim to reinforce the occurrence of replacement behaviors

## 4. Maintain dignity and respect



Maintain student's dignity and respect

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# Consequence Strategies: When Function of Problem Behavior is to gain Access



**1.** Withhold delivering tangible reinforcers following occurrence of problem behavior

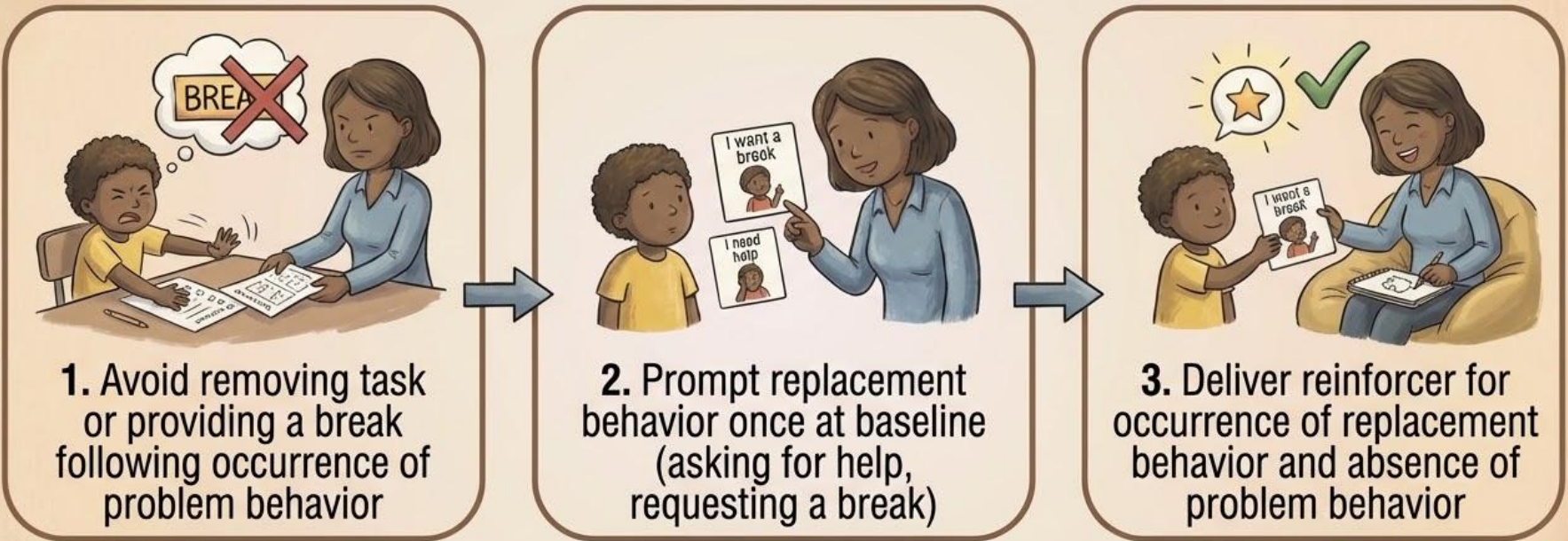


**2.** Prompt replacement behavior once at baseline levels

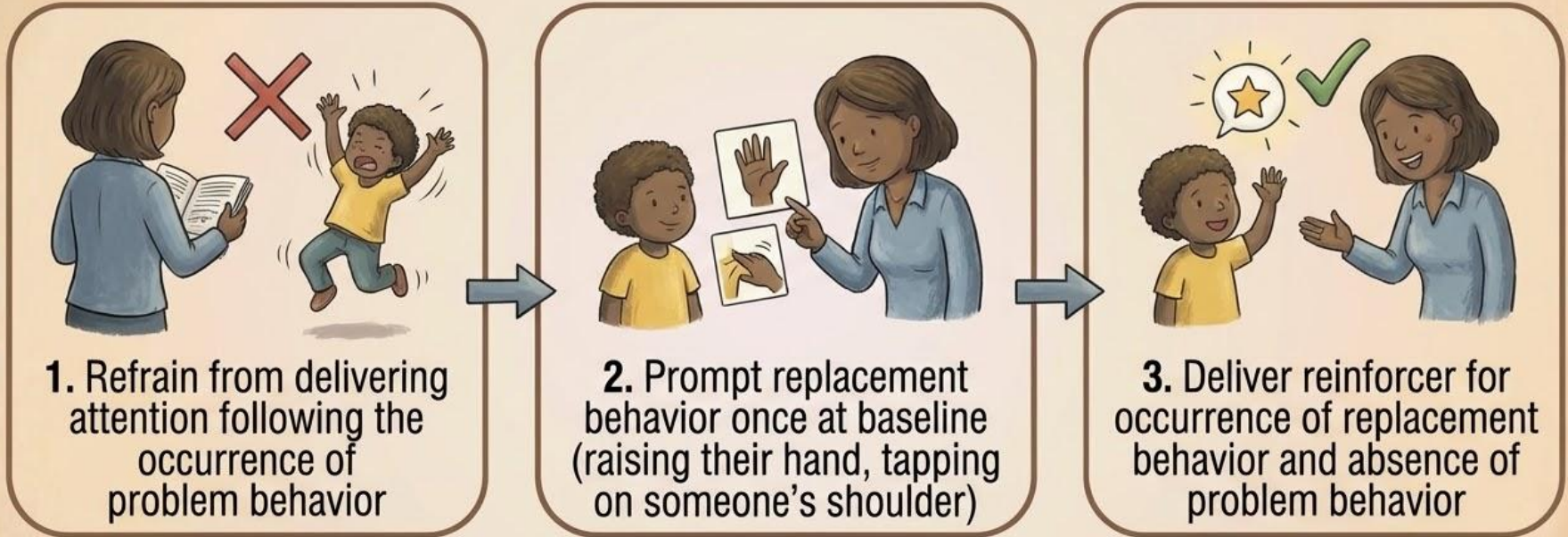


**3.** Deliver reinforcer for occurrence of replacement behavior in the absence of problem behavior

# Consequence Strategies: When Function of Problem Behavior is to Escape from Demand



# Consequence Strategies: When Function of Problem Behavior is to Recruit Attention



# Consequence Strategies when Function of Problem Behavior is Automatic



1. Interrupt the response

This illustration shows a woman in a blue shirt sitting at a table with a child in a yellow shirt. The child is clapping their hands. The woman is reaching out to stop the clapping. A large red 'X' is placed above the child's hands, indicating that this behavior is being interrupted.



2. Redirect to appropriately engaging with the environment

This illustration shows the same woman and child at the table. The child is now playing with a ball. The woman is holding the ball and looking at the child, indicating that the child's behavior has been redirected to a more appropriate activity.



3. Deliver reinforcer for occurrence of replacement behavior and absence of problem behavior

This illustration shows the woman and child at the table. The child is playing with toys. The woman is giving the child a thumbs up and a star in a speech bubble, indicating that the child's behavior is being reinforced.

# Functions of Behavior & Reinforcement Shift

## 1. Behavior Examples by Function

Provide a real-world scenario for each:

- Access
- Automatic
- Attention
- Escape

## 2. Shifting Reinforcement

How would you redirect reinforcement from a problem behavior to a more appropriate, functional alternative?



# Examples of what a Reinforcement Based Classroom Culture Looks Like

## 1. Positive Behavior Reward System



- a. Example: A “Class Dojo”-style system where students earn points for helping peers or staying on task.
- b. Reinforcement: Points can be exchanged for small privileges (extra free time, choosing a game, etc.).

## 2. Specific Verbal Praise



- a. Example: “I like how you showed your work step by step—that’s strong problem-solving.”
- b. Reinforcement: Encourages students to repeat the exact behavior being praised.

## 3. Behavior Contracts



- a. Example: A student agrees to raise their hand before speaking; if they succeed during the lesson, they earn a reward.
- b. Students set goals and receive reinforcement when they meet them.

**What other examples have you seen or implemented?**

# Tips for Implementing Reinforcement Effectively

- Initially, deliver reinforcement immediately after the positive behavior you are trying to see more of
- Deliver reinforcers that are meaningful to the student
- Pair the delivery of tangible reinforcers with social praise
- Be contingent- do not deliver reinforcers following problem behavior
- Gradually shift from primary reinforcers to secondary reinforcers or social reinforcers

 **Immediate Delivery**



Initially, deliver reinforcement immediately after the positive behavior you are trying to see more of.

 **Meaningful Reinforcers**



Deliver reinforcers that are meaningful to the student.

 **Pair with Praise**




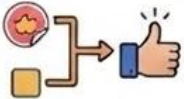
Pair the delivery of tangible reinforcers with social praise.

 **Be Contingent**



Be contingent - do not deliver reinforcers following problem behavior.

 **Gradual Shift**



Gradually shift from primary reinforcers to secondary reinforcers or social reinforcers.

# Reinforcement and Emotional Regulation



Increasing the amount of reinforcement a person accesses improves your mood

Reinforcement can help strengthen healthy coping behaviors



Reinforcement is used while gradually exposing individuals to a feared situation (exposure therapy)



Reinforcing successive approximations to a larger goal



Reinforcement helps increase healthy social engagement

# How ABA aligns with Mental Health



1. Encourage healthy and adaptive Behaviors



2. Support motivation and engagement during instruction



3. Building self-efficacy and confidence

4. Replacing harmful or maladaptive behaviors



5. Promoting emotional regulation



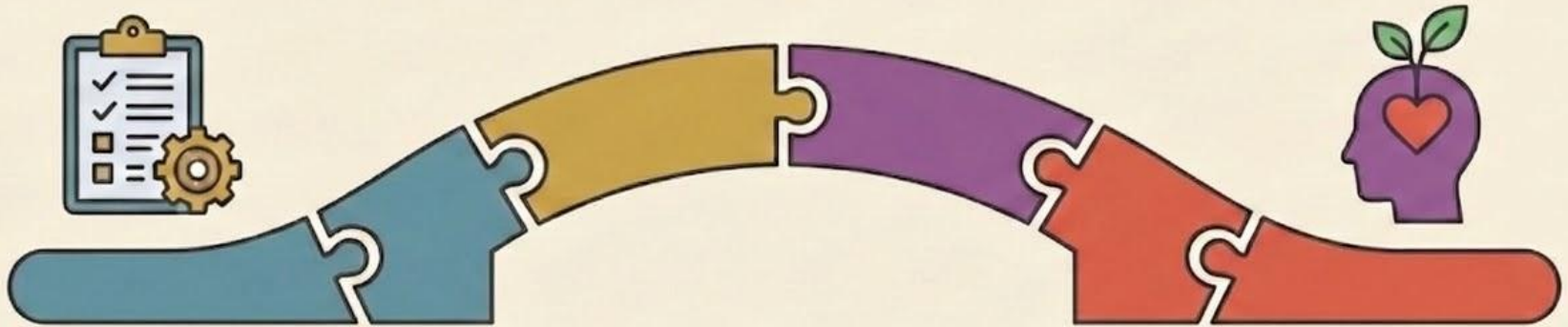
6. Evidence-based behavior change



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# Bridging the Gap between ABA and Mental Health



- Ultimate goal is for students to live happier, healthier lives where they feel successful
- Emphasize student autonomy
- Prioritize trust and rapport building
- Respecting neurodiversity
- Providing choice, safety and empowerment