

WHAT IS IT?

Reinforcement is providing something (praise, rewards) after a student displays a desired behavior that makes the behavior more likely to happen again. Reinforces come in many forms, for example, labeled praise, actively observing a student's actions, a hug, a sticker or



EXAMPLES

Sanaa walks into the classroom and sits on the carpet. The teacher says, "Thank you for sitting quietly!"

At the end of recess, the teacher gives high-fives to the students standing in line ready to go inside.

Michael falls to the ground crying and yelling when Center Time ends. The teacher ignores his tantrum and continues cleaning up with the other students. When Michael stops yelling and crying and begins to clean-up, she immediately approaches him, smiles and pats him on the back.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Students are highly motivated by the attention of an adult. So when a teacher consistently gives attention, praise, or rewards to the behaviors he or she wants to see, it helps students learn which behaviors the teacher values. Also, reinforcing one student's behavior helps other students learn and display positive behaviors (for example, praising one student for "sitting" draws attention to that positive behavior and encourages the other students to do the same).

Reinforcement increases student's self-esteem by drawing attention to what they are doing well. This can be particularly important for students who display challenging behaviors because adults typically spend more time paying attention to their negative behaviors (telling them what not to do) than acknowledging the things they are doing well.

- ✓ It's particularly effective to use labeled praise to describe the desired behavior because it lets the student (and his or her peers) know why he or she is receiving the teacher's attention (for example, "I like the way you are walking!").
- ✓ Differential attention is a great way to replace mild negative behavior such as whining and complaining with appropriate behaviors such as persistence and independence.
- ✓ A more formal reinforcement system can be used for behaviors that are more difficult to change.

GUIDE TO USING REINFORCEMENT

HOW TO USE REINFORCEMENT

1. Reinforcing positive behaviors

- ✓ See “Reinforcement System” under Additional Resources
- ✓ Choose positive behaviors you want to see more often (target the positive behaviors you want to replace negative behaviors with)
- ✓ Plan which reinforcers you will use (See “Examples of Reinforcers” under Additional Resources)
 - Vary your reinforcement method to keep the child interested. Switching up your reinforcer can be as simple as changing from using a sticker to a stamp.
- ✓ “Catch children being good” – be on the lookout for the behavior you want to see
- ✓ When the child displays a positive behavior, *immediately* provide reinforcement
 - Be sure to reinforce effort and progress, not the perfect display of behavior
- ✓ Monitor the student(s)’ response over time to see if the reinforcement is working
 - ❖ When using labeled praise, make sure to *specifically* describe the desired behavior. For example, “Great job walking down the hall with your hands at your side!” rather than “Good job” (see “Labeled Praise” under Additional Resources).
 - ❖ Be mindful that you are *not* giving a “back-handed” compliment (i.e., drawing attention to the student’s negative behavior). For example, “You did a great job cleaning up the crayons today. Why can’t you do that all the time?”

2. Differential attention

- ✓ Choose the mild negative behaviors you want to reduce
- ✓ Anticipate when the child may display the negative behavior you are targeting
- ✓ When the child displays negative behavior, do not show any attention to him or her (turn your back, walk away, attend to another child).
- ✓ Reinforce the child as soon as he or she displays a neutral or positive behavior
 - ❖ Be prepared for a short-term increase in the negative behavior. If a child is used to you attending to his or her negative behavior you are likely to see what is called an “extinction burst” – he or she will display more of the negative behavior briefly before stopping the behavior. If you are consistent in your use of differential attention the child will stop to the negative behavior quickly.

3. Use a reinforcement system

- ✓ See “Reinforcement System” under Additional Resources

GUIDE TO USING REINFORCEMENT

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT REINFORCEMENT

Examples of Reinforcers

[Available as PDF](#)

LOOK©

Reinforcement Systems

[Available as PDF](#)

LOOK©

Labeled Praise

[Available as PDF](#)

LOOK©

Visual Reinforcement Boards

[Available as PDF](#)

LOOK©