



Self-Regulation Guide to USING REINFORCEMENT

WHAT IS IT?

Reinforcement is providing something (i.e., attention, praise, reward) after a student displays a desired behavior that then makes the behavior more likely to happen again.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

John walks into the classroom and sits on the carpet. His teacher uses labeled praise by saying, “Thank you for sitting so quietly, John!”

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Children are highly motivated by the attention of an adult. So, when a teacher consistently gives attention, praise, or reward to the behaviors that they want to see, it helps students learn which behaviors are expected. Using reinforcement also increases students’ self-esteem by drawing attention to what they are doing *well* (as opposed to the times when they struggle to meet expectations).

Types of Reinforcement

There are many different ways to acknowledge students’ positive behavior.

- ☑ **Labeled Praise:** Drawing attention to positive behavior using specific, verbal praise.
“Jenny, I like how you are waiting so patiently for your turn on the swing!”
Instead of “Good job, Jenny!”
- ☑ **Tokens/Rewards:** Using small, tangible rewards to indicate appreciation of a desired behavior.
Students are given stickers as they arrive to the carpet for Circle Time after cleaning up.
- ☑ **Special Attention:** Giving physical attention (e.g., high-five), special recognition, or a special role to acknowledge positive behavior.
The most helpful student is acknowledged as the “Star Student” at the end of each week.
- ☑ **Differential Attention:** Ignoring mild undesired behavior (e.g., whining) and directing attention back to the student when the negative behavior is no longer displayed.
A student refuses to clean up. His teacher ignores his pouting and continues cleaning. As soon as the student begins to clean up, his teacher approaches, smiles, and pats him on the back.
- ☑ **Reinforcement System:** A more formal way of reinforcing behaviors that are harder to change.
A teacher gives a student who has trouble staying on-task a sticker every time she finishes an activity with less than 3 reminders. Once she has 5 stickers, a positive note is sent home.



TIPS FOR USING REINFORCEMENT

1. Rules of thumb

- ☒ “Catch them being good.”
Set students up for success by reinforcing behavior you *want* to see (e.g., sitting).
- ☒ Be intentional in selecting which reinforcers you will use.
Not *all* students like the same things. Consider the unique interests of students in deciding what will/will not work as reinforcers (see *Examples of Reinforcers* handout).
- ☒ Consistency is key!
Students learn what’s expected of them when your response is predictable.

2. When using labeled praise, tokens/rewards, or special attention...

- ☒ Clearly identify what it is (i.e., positive behavior) that you are reinforcing.
“Thank you for sitting so quietly!” instead of “Good job!”
- ☒ Give *immediately* after the positive behavior is displayed.
- ☒ Focus on effort and progress, not the “perfect” display of behavior.
For a student who constantly moves around during Circle Time, reinforce times when they are sitting instead of standing (*even if* they are still wiggling around).

3. When giving differential attention...

- ☒ Decide what mild behavior you want to reduce (e.g., whining, pouting).
- ☒ Anticipate when the student may display the targeted negative behavior.
- ☒ Do not pay attention to the student (e.g., walk away, turn your back, attend to another student) when they display this negative behavior.
- ☒ Reinforce the student *as soon as* they display a neutral or positive behavior.

4. When using a reinforcement system...

- ☒ Choose what type of system you want to use (see *Reinforcement Systems* or *Visual Reinforcement Boards* handouts).
- ☒ Identify target positive behaviors and how often you want to reinforce these behaviors.
- ☒ Make sure goals are attainable and realistic.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT USING REINFORCEMENT

Examples of Reinforcers	Labeled Praise	Reinforcement Systems	Visual Reinforcement Boards
Available as PDF	Available as PDF	Available as PDF	Available as PDF
LOOK©	LOOK©	LOOK©	LOOK©