

Behavior Basics

Volume 2

A Primer for
Autism Parents:
How to Use Positive
Reinforcement to
Build Skills

By Martha Gabler MA

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Behavior Basics Volume 2: A Primer for Autism Parents - How to Use Positive Reinforcement to Build Skills

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Part 1: Quick Review of Positive Reinforcement Vocabulary



1. Remember the ABCs of Behavior Science: Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence.

Behavior (physical movement of the body) occurs in a specific time and place. When studying behavior, analysts look at what happened just prior to the behavior (the Antecedent), the specific physical movements that the learner made (the Behavior itself), and what happened immediately after the behavior (the Consequence).

For example, let's look at this scenario: Antecedent: A child is told it's time to go inside. Behavior: Child screams. Consequence: Someone rushes over, comforts the child and gives him a lollipop. Please note the consequence that this child experienced when he screamed. This sequence of events will have an effect on the future behavior of both the boy and the instructor. Was the attention/lollipop a positive consequence that served as positive reinforcement or a negative consequence that the child perceived as punishment?

If the child perceived the attention and lollipop as a positive consequence, it will serve to reinforce the screaming behavior. The result will be more screaming behavior in the future when the child is asked to go inside.

If the child perceived the attention and lollipop as a negative consequence or punishment (the child doesn't want attention and doesn't want a lollipop and wants to be left outside), then the child will be less likely to scream, but he still won't want to come inside.

But shouldn't a child come inside when called? Yes, but.... For a child with autism, a transition from a desired activity such as being outside in the yard, to coming inside for a task or an errand, can be a difficult experience. For this reason, the call to come inside should be planned in advance, with thought given to preparing the child for the change and giving positive reinforcement for all actions related to entering the house.

Bottom Line: Pay attention to the ABCs!



2. What is Behavior? Behavior is movement, physical movement of the body.

Behavior is composed of physical movements of the body. Imagine somebody playing the drums: the hands hold the drumsticks, the feet press down on the pedals, the torso twists as the drummer turns from one drum to another to play. Now imagine getting into a train: the arms carry luggage, the feet climb up the steps into the train, the head swivels around to find a place to sit, and finally the body comes to rest after hoisting the suitcase onto the luggage rack. Every behavior we do is composed of anywhere from one to dozens of distinct physical movements of parts of the body, and in certain sequences.

Behavior Basics 2 #3

The consequence, NOT the antecedent determines the future course of a behavior.

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3. The consequence, NOT the antecedent determines the future course of a behavior.

The consequence rules! The consequence of a behavior determines what course the behavior will take in the future. A behavior that results in a pleasing consequence to the learner will be repeated in the future. A behavior that results in painful or distasteful consequences will generally not be repeated in the future. We all seek pleasure and avoid pain and discomfort.

This is a fundamental law of behavioral science. This fundamental law of behavioral science applies to all living things, both human and animal.



4. A pleasant consequence causes a behavior to occur more frequently

This fact, this scientific law, underlies all behavioral interventions. This fact tells us how we can increase desired behaviors in learners.

Whenever a learner performs a desired behavior, make sure he or she immediately experiences a wonderful consequence! The learner will do that behavior again, and eventually the learner will do that behavior for longer times.

Providing pleasant consequences, or positive reinforcement, to increase desired behaviors is the most humane and effective way to address behavior problems.

“Research has shown that the most effective way to reduce problem behavior in children is to strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement rather than trying to weaken undesirable behavior using aversive or negative processes.” Dr. Sidney Bijou, 1908-2009.

"Kids (like all of us) are reinforcement-seeking missiles; they will go wherever there is the highest level and best quality of reinforcement."
Christina Burk

This wonderful quote is from the website of ABA Consultant Christina Burk; see (Burk, Christina, Retrieved from *Errorless Learning*, <http://www.christinaburkaba.com/ELvsNNP.htm>)

Imagine your child as having long sensitive antennae that constantly wave about seeking positive reinforcement. They crave it. They sense it immediately. They are always on the lookout for it. They always react accordingly. They always act “lawfully” (i.e., they increase behaviors that result in positive reinforcement.)



5. All living beings actively seek out positive consequences (positive reinforcement)

We autism parents must learn to be aware of what we are doing, to observe whether our children perceive our actions as reinforcing or not, and to be aware of the impact of reinforcement on our children's behavior. We must learn to use positive reinforcement in our daily lives.

There are people who, for various reasons, don't like the idea of using positive reinforcement. They have the right to those feelings. However, our children, and all other living creatures, understand their environments in terms of positive reinforcement. Our children with autism seek out positive reinforcement because they like success and

they want guidance. The positive reinforcement they experience will shape their behavior in the future.

Even if we parents don't like the idea, our children live accordingly to these principles. Isn't it better to understand how our children experience their world and use this knowledge productively? There's nothing wrong with telling a child he is right. The more opportunities he has to be right, the more he will do those great things.

Remember Grandma's advice, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."



6. Positive Reinforcement is a Powerful Tool for Building New Skills

All humans, including children with autism, will perform an action more often if they experience positive reinforcement. We can purposefully insert positive reinforcement into a child's program with the goal of increasing functional behaviors – behaviors that will help the child gain skills in the home, classroom, and community.

With positive reinforcement and careful planning we can increase a child's fine motor and gross motor skills. We can increase academic skills. We can increase social skills so that the child can participate in family, school, and community activities.

Behavior Basics 2 #7

Positive reinforcement is respectful of the child's ability and need for information.

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7. Positive Reinforcement is Respectful of the Child's Capacity and Need for Information

Properly done, positive reinforcement increases skills by starting at the child's current level of performance, allowing the child to progress at his or her own rate, and providing immediate feedback when the child has performed an action correctly.

Children, especially those with autism, want to learn new skills, yet they have specific requirements to achieve this. They need:

- Immediate feedback.
- Information delivered in small pieces.
- Information delivered at a pace that matches their capacity.
- Precise, targeted positive reinforcement meets these needs.

Part 2: Assessment and Task Analysis



- 8. Assess your learner first, before you do anything else, so you know the child's skill levels and areas of strength and weakness.**

The first step in working with any child is to assess the child's current skill levels. You want to know what behaviors the child can do, and you want to know how long the child can perform those behaviors for. If you start teaching skills that are too easy, the child will be bored. If you start teaching skills that are too hard, the child will become restless and stressed.

A good assessment will show you where to start. There is a free downloadable Child Observation Chart on the Chaos to Calm blog. <http://autismchaostocalm.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Child-Observation-chart.pdf>

There are many other assessments available; here are a few. Dr. Martin Kozloff's book, *Educating Children with Learning and Behavior Problems*, has an excellent Behavior Evaluation Scale. See http://www.amazon.com/Educating-Children-Learning-Behavior-Problems/dp/B001NXWF38/ref=sr_1_10?ie=UTF8&qid=1403892993&sr=8-10&keywords=martin+kozloff,

The ABLLS-R, the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills-Revised, is a highly regarded and much used assessment tool: <http://www.partingtonbehavioranalysts.com/shop/ABLLS-R-The-Assessment-of-Basic-Language-and-Learning-Skills-Revised.html>.

For general information, see this free Organization for Autism Research (OAR) publication, *Life Journey Through Autism: A Parent's Guide to Assessment* at: <http://www.researchautism.org/resources/reading/documents/AssessmentGuide.pdf>



9. After the Learner Assessment, select tasks to work on that play to your child's strengths.

When you know your child's areas of strength and weakness, you can better determine which tasks to start with. Start with tasks that draw as much as possible upon your child's areas of strength. Save for later the tasks which require actions in areas where your child is weak.

Behavior Basics 2 #10

A Task Analysis describes the many small steps that go into performing a single activity.

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10. Do a Task Analysis: A Task Analysis describes the many small steps that go into performing a single activity. Do the task yourself and write down each small step.

A helpful way to start with a task analysis is to do the action yourself. Go through the motions slowly and write down each step. Describe how you move each part of your body. What do you do with your feet, hands, fingers, and torso to complete the task? How many steps are in the task? What objects do you use, if any? How many minutes does it take you to complete the task? Write down these facts!

SKILL BUILDING EXAMPLE: A Task Analysis of Putting on Underpants requires these actions: walking, pulling, grasping, standing, bending, lifting feet, pulling up, to name just a few.

Here are some actions involved in putting on underpants:

1. Walk to dresser/closet
2. Pull open drawer/open door
3. Pull underpants out of drawer
4. Insert thumb inside waistband
5. With thumb and fingers grasp underpants
6. Pick up underpants
7. Hold underpants in front of body
8. Lean against bed (or Sit On Bed, if necessary for balance)
9. Hold pants down to foot level
10. Lift one foot up
11. Slide foot into hole of underpants
12. Lift other foot up
13. Slide foot into hole of underpants
14. Bend down
15. Pull up pants to waist

Physical movements of many parts of the body are involved in this seemingly mundane task. At any point in this “behavior chain” a child may need pre-teaching or muscle skill development for the fine and gross motor actions necessary.

Behavior Basics 2 #11

A Task Analysis reveals the “Behavior Chain” – the complete list of steps involved in a single task.

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11. A Task Analysis Reveals the “Behavior Chain” – the complete list of steps involved in a single task

After completing a Task Analysis, we often end up with a “behavior chain.” A behavior chain is all the steps necessary to complete a task. Often, seemingly simple tasks are quite complex, as noted in the example of putting on underpants. Most of us think of that as a simple action: with a swoosh, the underpants are on! Not so. For this reason, it is very important to do the action yourself, write down the separate steps, and make careful notes of all the muscle movements involved.

Once you know all the steps and actions involved, check to see whether your child can perform these steps.



12. Assess the Match-up Between Learner and Task Analysis: Can the learner *physically perform* all the steps in this task?

Take your filled-in Child Observation Form and the list of steps from the Task Analysis. Does the child have all the physical skills (ability to move legs, arms, hands, and fingers) to do the task? If the child has the skills, you can start teaching that task. If the child lacks something, you will have to pre-teach that physical skill before starting the task.

For example if the child can't lift one foot while holding his underpants you may have to teach this skill separately before starting the full task.

Behavior Basics 2 #13

Make sure your learner can physically perform the number of steps in the task you are asking for.

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13. Assess the Match-up Between Learner and Task Analysis: Can the child do a task with that *number of steps*?

A child may be able to do a two or three-step task, but may struggle with a six-step task. If this is the case, then back up; teach and practice several two and three-step tasks until the child can perform them fluently. Move up to four-step tasks, then five-step tasks and so on.

Behavior Basics 2 #14

*Make sure your learner can work for the **length of time** it takes to complete the task that you are asking for.*

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14. Assess the Match-up Between Learner and Task Analysis: Can the child work for the *length of time* it takes to complete the task?

A child may be able to work at something for two minutes, but erupt into a tantrum at three minutes. Always respect a child's endurance. Work with the current level of endurance, and slowly and patiently increase her capacity to work for longer periods of time.

To see how long a task takes, do it yourself and time yourself. This will give you an idea. Naturally, an adult can do things more quickly than a child, so take this into consideration.

Part 3: From Task Analysis to Behavior Chain



TAGteach (Teaching with Acoustical Guidance) is a teaching method that is particularly useful for children with autism.

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- 15. TAGteach (Teaching with Acoustical Guidance) is a communication and teaching method particularly useful for children with autism.**

TAGteach stands for Teaching with Acoustical Guidance. TAGteach is a teaching and communication method based on the scientific principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).

Questions: What makes TAGteach so effective?

Answer: The extremely precise and immediate feedback!

TAGteach enables extremely precise positive reinforcement of behavior by using an acoustical signal to “mark” the behavior – at the precise moment the child performs the behavior! The acoustical signal is a short, sharp sound made by a handheld device (the “tagger”). When the child performs the correct action, the parent/instructor immediately presses the button on the tagger and hands over a reinforcer (candy, treat, token, praise, social recognition, or money).

With TAGteach, it is easy to reinforce behaviors precisely and quickly. The immediate, accurate feedback and positive reinforcement result in the child performing the correct action more often, and for longer periods of time. With immediate feedback and learning tasks broken down into small steps, children (and adults) can learn many new skills with TAGteach -- at their own pace.

There is nothing else like it.

Behavior Basics 2 #16

With TAGteach you can “capture” brief, fleeting moments of behavior.

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16. TAGteach is a particularly useful for children with autism because you can “capture” brief, fleeting moments of behavior.

As autism parents know, children with autism often appear as a blur of movement. They move their bodies quickly and do multiple actions at once. Productive behaviors may be present, but they are often brief and fleeting. A flash of eye contact – then it’s gone. A split second of looking at a toy or a person – then it’s over. A single word or meaningful gesture– and that’s the end of it.

TAGteach, with the quick tag of the tagger lets parents “capture” those beautiful, fleeting behaviors. The tag “marks” the desired behavior for the child. When the child realizes that eye contact, visual focus, and words result in reinforcement, praise, and attention from mom and dad, the child will perform those behaviors more often.

Such brief, transitory behaviors cannot be reinforced successfully with verbal praise. The words are too confusing and will be much too late to tell the child what he did that was right. This type of split-second reinforcing can only be done with the tag – the acoustical support.

Behavior Basics 2 #17

A Task Analysis reveals potential “Tag Points” - specific behaviors that will be reinforced in a behavior chain.

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17. A Task Analysis Reveals Potential “Tag Points” -- actions that will be reinforced in the Behavior Chain

In the earlier example of putting on underpants, each step in the behavior chain reveals the “tag point.” The tag point is the absolute part of a behavior that when/as performed will receive the audible mark (tag).

Each step, or tag point, in a behavior chain should be taught and reinforced. TAGteach is an excellent method for “marking” and reinforcing a learner’s behavior. The moment that the learner performs the desired tag point the

parent/instructor immediately tags (clicks) and hands over a reinforcer. The tag signals to the child that he/she has performed the action correctly and will be getting a reinforcer. The tag signals success, "Yes, you did it!" Since the child experienced reinforcement, he will perform that behavior again.

Behavior Basics 2 #18

A successful behavior goal (or tag point) is specific, achievable, and easy to describe.

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18. A Successful Tag Point is Specific, Achievable, and Easy to Describe; use the “WOOF” criteria.

The tag point is the crucial teaching focus point in the TAGteach process. The four criteria for a tag point are:

- What you want
- One criterion
- Observable and measurable
- Five words or less

Always check to see if your tag point meets all four criteria.

Let's check one of the tag points from the Putting On Underpants example to see whether it meets all four criteria. Let's look at the last tag point Pull Up Underpants.

Is it what you want? YES. We want the child to pull his underpants up to his waist.

Is it one criterion? YES. Pulling up underpants is one action.

Is it observable? YES. You can see when a child pulls up his underpants.

Is it 5 words or less? YES. Pulls Up Underpants is three words.

By reviewing the criteria, we know that Pull Up Underpants is a good tag point because it meets all four criteria. It is clear and specific; we can see when the learner performs it. It is a single action, so as soon as the learner pulls up his underpants, we can easily tag the behavior and give reinforcement.

In contrast, let's look at a tag point that is not well designed. An instructor would like a child to clean up the toys in the play area. The instructor says, "The tag point is: pick up the toys, put them in the bin, and put the bin on the shelf." Let's do the tag point criteria review. Remember, the tag point must meet all four criteria.

Is it what you want? YES. You want the child to do this complete clean-up task.

Is it one criterion? NO. There are three separate actions.

Is it observable? YES. You can see a child do these actions.

Is it 5 words or less? NO. This tag point is sixteen words!

This tag point fails the criteria test. It is too long and complex. A tag point should be achievable for the child; with this tag point there is a possibility that the child will fail.

Behavior Basics 2 #19

The best way to teach the series of steps (tag points) in a behavior chain is backwards.

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19. The best way to teach the series of steps (Tag Points) in a behavior chain is backwards.

Example: Backchaining the Behavior Chain of Putting on Underpants

This sounds backwards, yet the best way to teach a behavior chain is by starting with the very last step in the process.

Why?

Think of memorizing a poem with ten lines. It's much easier to do this if you memorize Line 10 first. After you know Line 10, you memorize Line 9. What comes after Line 9? Line 10! And you know Line 10! So now it's easy, you recite Line 9 and immediately go into Line 10. Now, you work on Line 8, and lo and behold, you can now easily recite Lines 8, 9, and 10. Each time you practice, it becomes easier and easier because you know exactly *what comes next!* Since everything that comes next is *easy*, it is also *reinforcing*.

Each step in the chain reinforces the previous behavior. This is why teaching with "back chaining" is so successful. As soon as you have your series of steps, or "behavior chain," remember back chaining.

In the underpants example, the best way to teach this chain would be to assist the child in all the steps and then teach the very last step: Pull Up Underpants. If the child needs help, you could even pull the underpants up to the child's knees, then ask him to pull up the last little bit to his waist. At the precise moment that he pulls the underpants up to his waist, tag and reinforce! When he can independently pull the underpants up to his waist, teach the step that precedes that, Bend Down.

BACK CHAINING WITH TAGteach: The secret to successful teaching.

Professional trainers and professionals with advanced degrees in Applied Behavior Analysis know about the trainer's secret weapon for extreme reliability. That is...

backchaining. If you are a teacher, coach or parent who teaches skills to others, you need to know about this too!

Back chaining is a concept foreign to many and counter-intuitive to most who first learn of it, yet it is a very effective way to build highly reliable behaviors. It is one of the key techniques that any TAGteacher should understand and apply properly. A reliable behavior is one that looks the same each time the subject performs it.

Back chaining involves teaching a skill starting at the end and working back to the beginning. For example we would teach a child to come down the ladder to a climbing structure safely before teaching him to climb up it. This way we know that once he climbs up he will be able climb down.

Behavior Basics 2 #20

When teaching a new task, be sure to start at the “point of success”: something the child can DO.

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20. Important Reminder: When teaching a new task, be sure to start at the “point of success”: something the child can DO.

Start at the “point of success.” The “point of success” is a place to start or a place to return to where the student is guaranteed a tag. This means make sure that the child can perform the action you would like him to perform more often. In the underpants example, when starting with the last step of Pull Up Underpants, be sure that he can actually grasp and pull up the pants. If the child has weak fine motor skills and is unable to grasp for the amount of time

necessary, the step would have to be re-designed so the child can perform it.

There are several solutions to this problem. In the case of poor muscle strength in the hands, the child can be taught to do activities that increase muscle strength. The child can be given opportunities to practice squeezing a ball, picking up small items with pincer grasp, and building these skills to fluent levels. Another option could be to ask the child to keep his Hands On Underpants while mom pulls them up for him; this way he participates in the activity, learns the procedure, and will be able to do it independently when his hand strength increases.

The reason for the “point of success” is to ensure that the child has success and will earn the tag and reinforcement! TAGteach is all about ensuring success for the learner, so the learner feels that thrill of accomplishment. We all like success. Kids with autism are no different. They want to achieve too.

We want that child to learn and to feel proud. We want to build a relationship of trust with that child so he feels confident that his environment supports his needs and helps him progress. When a child knows he will have successful positive experiences, he will look forward to trying more and doing more.

Fear decreases and confidence increases.

Part 4: Teaching the Behavior Chain with Reinforcement Schedules

At this point we have done the following:

- Reviewed the ABCs (Antecedent/Behavior/Consequences)
- Learned the importance of positive reinforcement for increasing desired behaviors
- Assessed our learner (via the Child Observation Chart)
- Conducted a task analysis (for example, getting dressed)
- Developed a behavior chain
- Set tag points based on the behavior chain using the four WOOF criteria
- Using back chaining, have selected the last step in the behavior chain to teach
- Ensured that the child can perform the task being presented, i.e., that he starts at the “point of success”

Now we are ready to start teaching. To teach a child with autism we need to learn how to use reinforcement effectively. This means, how often do we reinforce and for how long? This section will describe the different rates at which to reinforce behaviors: reinforcement schedules.

Reinforcement schedules may seem complex at first, yet after a while they become second nature.

Now, some review of reinforcement and reinforcers, and facts about reinforcement schedules.



21. What is a reinforcer? Answer: a positive consequence that strengthens a behavior (physical movement).

A positive consequence that strengthens behavior is a “reinforcer.” A reinforcer is anything following a behavior that strengthens the behavior or causes it to occur more often. Sometimes people refer to the “reinforcer” as a “reward.” While this is a commonly used word, the technically correct term, “reinforcer,” more accurately describes the result of *strengthening* or *reinforcing* a behavior.

The key point to remember is that the reinforcer is the Consequence (it comes after the behaviour), not before the behavior.

The reinforcer should be given *during* or *immediately after* the desired behavior.

The TAGteach (Teaching with Acoustical Guidance) method makes it easy to “mark” and reinforce a behavior exactly on time. When the learner performs the desired behavior, immediately “tag” (with the tagger) and hand over a reinforcer. The “tag” is the acoustical signal that tells the learner she correctly performed the desired action. The reinforcer is the treat.

The tag and the reinforcer together form the *positive consequence*.



22. What do reinforcers consist of? Answer: Something the learner likes and will work for.

There are many types of reinforcers for children. Primary reinforcers are items like candy, food, drinks, treats, and trinkets. General reinforcers are tokens, points, and money. Social rewards are praise and recognition. Activity rewards are things like going to the park, baking chocolate chip cookies, or going to the movies.

To see what works best for a particular child, spend some time observing and seeing what he or she likes, looks at, and seeks out. It may be only one or two things, but that's a start. When I started working with my son at age three, the only thing he liked was for me to press the button on his Buzz Lightyear action figure to hear it say, "To infinity and beyond." He also liked candy. I used both as reinforcers.

Observe the child, make notes of what he looks at, what he listens to, and what he pays attention to.

Anything that appears interesting to a child can be turned into a reinforcer; he may like to see the curtains flapping in the breeze, so use this to devise an attractive reinforcer. This is a time for creative observation. There are also lists of reinforcers on the internet with great ideas for things to try. It is important to focus on finding things that appeal to each child, because effective, *personalized* reinforcers are crucial for building new skills.

Behavior Basics 2 #23

*A Preference Assessment can be done to determine which items your child likes best and that can be used as **reinforcers**.*

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23. A Preference Assessment is a formal procedure to determine which items your child likes best and that can be used as reinforcers.

If you have access to ABA services, your consultant can do a Preference Assessment (or Reinforcer Survey). A Preference Assessment involves collecting information about an individual's likes and dislikes. The goal is to find items that the child enjoys and will experience as being reinforcing. One child may like bubbles, another may not. This information is collected via interviews, surveys, and direct observation. The goal is to have a list of items or activities that the child prefers.

Behavior Basics 2 #24

A “reinforcement schedule” is a plan for delivering positive reinforcement at certain times or at certain rates.

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24. The concept of a “reinforcement schedule” is important for autism parents to learn. A “reinforcement schedule” is a plan for delivering positive reinforcement at certain times or at certain rates.

A schedule is when and how often something happens. Each of us has a schedule. Some things we do often, some we do rarely. Generally, we eat three times per day and shower once per day. We may be paid every week, every two weeks, or once per month. We go to the dentist twice per year. We file taxes once per year.

With behavioral science, we deliver reinforcement according to a reinforcement schedule. The schedule of reinforcement is critical for two stages of learning: *building* behaviors (getting them going) and *maintaining* behaviors (keeping them going).

REINFORCEMENT: What is a reinforcement schedule in behavioral science? Answer: It is when and how often you reinforce a behavior.

There are five types of reinforcement schedules:

Continuous Reinforcement Schedule

Fixed Ratio Schedule

Variable Ratio Schedule

Fixed Interval Schedule

Variable Interval Schedule

Each one has a use, and each will be explained.

You use a Continuous Reinforcement Schedule to *build* a behavior (get it started), and a Ratio or Interval schedule to *maintain* a behavior (keep it going).

REINFORCEMENT: There are five types of reinforcement schedules. Only the Continuous Reinforcement schedule is used to *build* a behavior. The four Ratio and Interval schedules are used to *maintain* a behavior (keep it going).

In behavioral science, a reinforcement schedule is when and how often we reinforce a behavior. Schedules are important for building and maintaining behaviors. When we reinforce, we deliver a positive consequence during or immediately after the precise moment the child performs a desired behavior.

When we deliver positive consequences according to the correct schedule, we can build behaviors faster and in less time.

Children with autism are extremely sensitive to the rate of reinforcement they receive and they respond accordingly. They are extremely sensitive!

Even if we don't know or like the idea of positive reinforcement and reinforcement schedules, our kids behave in accordance with these scientific principles. We may as well know them and use them to help the child learn useful skills.



25. What is the difference between *building* a behavior and *maintaining* a behavior? Answer: building means *get it started*; *maintaining* means *keep it going*.

When you *build* a behavior, you get that behavior going. The behavior you want may be happening very rarely; for example, a child may rarely give eye contact. With *continuous reinforcement*, you reinforce the child every single time he performs eye contact behavior. With continuous reinforcement you gradually build up the child's capacity to do that behavior more often. Once the child can do the behavior consistently, you want her to keep it up.

To keep up the behavior, you must switch to a different rate of reinforcement. You stop reinforcing the eye contact every time it

happens, and change to reinforcing it every now and then. There are four *maintenance* schedules to choose from

- Fixed Ratio Schedule
- Variable Ratio Schedule
- Fixed Interval Schedule
- Variable Interval Schedule

Each will be explained.



26. What is a Continuous Reinforcement Schedule? Answer: You reinforce a behavior every time it happens!

You use a Continuous Reinforcement Schedule to build a behavior, to get it going. Often a child with autism will display a desired behavior, eye contact for example, but it is fleeting and rare. If you want to increase your child's eye contact, reinforce your child every time she glances, even partially, in your general direction. With TAGteach, the initial tag point could be Eyes Toward Me and eventually, Eyes On Me. Every time the girl's eyes are on her mother's face, the mother would tag (press tagger to mark behavior) and give a treat (reinforcer). The mother would observe her daughter closely and tag and treat every instance of Eyes On Me.

A continuous reinforcement schedule results in the eye contact behavior happening more often and lasting for longer periods of time. It's how you get a behavior going.

Please note, with TAGteach, there is no coercion or duress for the child when building a skill such as eye contact. She is the one who decides how often to demonstrate her eye contact behavior, so she can develop this skill at her own pace. She may offer the behavior only once every two days, in which case she would be reinforced only once every two days. After time, she may start offering the behavior once per day, then three times per day and so forth. For each instance she should be reinforced.



27. The Continuous Reinforcement Schedule is for *building* a behavior, getting it started.

We use a Continuous Reinforcement schedule to get a behavior going, to get it started. A child may perform a desired behavior very rarely. For example, a young child may say “ma” or “da” once a month, if that. We would like her to say those sounds more often.

We cannot force her to say those beautiful sounds more often, but we can reinforce her every time she says them. When we give her intense, targeted reinforcement every time she makes those sounds, she will say them more often, and for longer periods, for example, “ma, ma,” or “da, da, da.”

The Continuous Reinforcement Schedule will get this behavior going and growing.

REINFORCEMENT: The four remaining schedules (ratio and interval) are for *maintaining* a behavior (keeping it going).

Once a child is performing a behavior consistently, we want her to keep it up. Surprisingly to many people, continuous reinforcement does *not* keep a behavior going, or, “maintain” it!

To keep a behavior going, we must *change* the reinforcement schedule. We must change from reinforcing it every time to reinforcing it every now and then. There are four ways to reduce reinforcement levels; these four reinforcement schedules are described below.

The eventual goal of the “maintenance” schedules is to reduce the reinforcement to low levels. Surprisingly, reducing and varying the reinforcement rate is the most effective way to keep the behavior going, or, to “maintain” it!

We can then go back to using continuous reinforcement to teach a new behavior.

Behavior Basics 2 #28

The Fixed Ratio Schedule is for maintaining behavior. Reinforce every two occurrences or any other fixed number of occurrences.

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28. The Fixed Ratio Schedule is for maintaining behavior: Tag and reinforce consistently every two occurrences or any other fixed number of occurrences.

The purpose of the ratio schedules is to keep a behavior going, and eventually to keep with going with very low reinforcement. With a Fixed Ratio Schedule, you reinforce the behavior according to a set number.

Think back to skip-counting in elementary school. We learned to count by 2's, 3's, 5's, and so on. On a Fixed Ratio Schedule you would reinforce this girl's eye contact behavior once every 2 occurrences, or once every 3 occurrences, or once every 5 occurrences (or any other fixed number of occurrences).

This schedule will keep the girl's eye contact behavior going. With TAGteach, you would tag every 2nd occurrence (or any other fixed number of occurrences) when the girl gives eye contact behavior, and follow-up with a treat (reinforcer).

Behavior Basics 2 #29

The Variable Ratio Schedule is for maintaining behavior: Reinforce after 2, then 4, then 3, then 5 occurrences, or any other number of occurrences.

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29. The Variable Ratio Schedule is for maintaining behavior: Tag and reinforce randomly after 2, 4, 3, or 5 occurrences, or any other number of occurrences.

With a Variable Ratio Schedule, you change how often you reinforce the girl's eye contact behavior from the same number of occurrences to a random number of occurrences. For example, you might reinforce her after 2 occurrences, 4 occurrences, 3 occurrence, and then 5 occurrences. The girl would not be able to predict when the reinforcer is coming.

With TAGteach, you might tag after the 2nd occurrence, after the 3rd, after the 5th, or after the 7th, and of course follow-up with the reinforcer.

The Variable Ratio Schedule is a very powerful way to maintain a behavior over the long term. TAGteach is especially amenable to this schedule of reinforcement. It is so easy to pull out the tagger and give a quick tag and treat when you see a child performing a desired behavior. No need to say anything, no need to remember a specific number of occurrences or amount of time, just press the tagger and hand over a treat, and the behavior is maintained!

Behavior Basics 2 #30

The Fixed Interval Schedule is for maintaining behavior: Reinforce the first correct behavior after a specific amount of time. For example: 4 minutes.

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30. The Fixed Interval Schedule is for maintaining behavior: Tag and reinforce the first instance of the correct behavior after a specific amount of time, for example: the first behaviour after 4 minutes.

With a Fixed Interval Schedule, think about a consistent amount of time rather than a number of occurrences. For example, the mother might reinforce her daughter for the first instance of eye contact after every 4 minutes. This would involve watching the clock, or setting a timer, and reinforcing the girl consistently every four minutes when she is giving eye contact. With TAGteach, every 4 minutes, the parent would tag and treat, if the girl is showing eye contact.

The parent or instructor could change the amount of time in accordance with the development of the skill. If the girl is doing very well with this skill, the time interval could be lengthened to every 8

minutes or every 30 minutes, for example. If the skill needs some shoring up, the time interval could be changed to every 2 minutes or every 3 minutes. This allows for a great deal of flexibility.

Behavior Basics 2 #31

The Variable Interval Schedule is for maintaining behavior: Reinforce the first correct behavior after a variable amount of time.

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31. The Variable Interval Schedule is for maintaining behavior: Tag and reinforce the first correct behavior after a variable amount of time.

With a Variable Interval Schedule, the parent or instructor can reinforce the girl for eye contact after changing amounts of time. She could tag and reinforce the the first instance of eye contact behavior after 2 minutes, 5 minutes, 7 minutes, then 3 minutes, at random. Over time, these random intervals can be stretched for longer times: after 35 minutes, 50 minutes, 2 hours, and eventually, after 2 days, 4 days, 3 weeks, or even longer.

The Variable Ratio Schedule is the most powerful way to maintain a behavior over the long term. TAGteach is especially amenable to this schedule of reinforcement. It is so easy to pull out the tagger and give a

quick tag and treat when you see a child performing a desired behavior. No need to say anything, no need to remember a specific number of occurrences or amount of time, just press the tagger and hand over a treat, and the behavior is maintained!

Behavior Basics 2 #32

*To get **spectacular** behavior, use a variable schedule by reinforcing only the very **best** examples of the behavior.*

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32. To get spectacular behavior, use a Variable Schedule and tag only the very best examples of the behavior!

Here's a hint for any easy way to build really strong performance: when using a Variable Schedule: tag and treat for only the most spectacular performance of the desired action. This will naturally allow you to maintain a Variable Interval Schedule, plus you will be reinforcing the "best of the best" in terms of responses.

We call this "Gold Star" instances of the desired behavior.

More about this later!

REINFORCEMENT REVIEW: Use Continuous Reinforcement to get a behavior going. Use Fixed and Variable Ratio and Interval Schedules to keep the behavior going.

Let's review what we've learned about helping our kids with autism. We want our kids to develop new skills. First, define what you are interested in teaching to the child. Break the task down into the smallest possible components. See which components the child can already perform. Remember, start at the point of success!

Use Continuous Reinforcement to increase the child's performance of those components to fluent levels. TAGteach is perfect for Continuous Reinforcement: you can tag, tag, tag accurately every 2 or 3 seconds. Once the behavior is fluent, put it on a Variable Interval reinforcement schedule to maintain it. And remember to tag and reinforce only the most spectacular performances of that behavior!

REINFORCEMENT: Use the Variable Schedule to Capture the BEST (Gold Star) Behaviors. Then the top performance will become the norm!

Behavior is naturally variable, so your child's performance of a new behavior may be of low, medium, or high quality.

Use this fact to your advantage! Observe carefully to tag and reinforce only the most superb examples of the desired behavior – the Gold Star examples. Not only will this naturally turn out to be a Variable schedule, the behavior will be maintained at a high level of quality.

If you reinforce behavior at the high quality end of what is naturally occurring, then the high-end performances will become more frequent and you will have even higher quality behaviors to reinforce at the high end. The good becomes better, which becomes the best, and it keeps on going from there. This is a win-win situation for everyone.

TAGteach is an outstanding method for reinforcing behaviors on all of these schedules, and for precisely marking that fabulous Gold Star instance of behavior.

Behavior Basics 2 #33

*Once the child learns a behavior properly the behavior will become **strong and reliable**, and the child will be able to perform it without your reinforcement.*

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33. Will my child ever be able to do these behaviors without reinforcement? Answer: YES. The new skills will become fluent behaviors.

Many parents express concerns that if they reinforce their children for behaviors, the child will become dependent on the reinforcement, perhaps forever. This concern is understandable, yet parents need not worry about this. When the child learns the behavior properly, it will become strong and reliable, and the child will be able to perform it independently in different settings.

When done properly, in the early stage behaviors are reinforced continuously to get them going. In the middle stage, when the child is performing the behavior reliably, drop back to a Variable Schedule as described above. In the last stage, use the Variable Schedule described

above to select and reinforce only the most superb examples of the behavior.

Finally, the new behaviors will lead to expanded skills sets, so the child can do more and participate more. The new behaviors will become self-reinforcing.

Behavior Basics 2 #34

*The ultimate goal when teaching behavior is to move from **contrived** reinforcers to **naturally occurring** reinforcers.*

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34. The ultimate goal is to move from contrived reinforcers to naturally occurring reinforcers.

With every teaching plan, the goal is to *fade* or *thin out* the reinforcement schedule as the child becomes more and more proficient at performing the behavior. For example, when I started teaching my son Safe Walking skills, I had to reinforce on a continuous schedule for each incident of him taking Two Steps In Same Direction. I was *building* this skill.

After he mastered all the skills in the Safe Walking program we were able to go for five-mile hikes with a hiking club. At this point, he did not need reinforcers any more. The fun and enjoyment of being outside and going for long walks was rewarding of itself. The natural reinforcer of taking walks and going for hikes *maintained* his Safe

Walking skills. Do I still give him a little treat every now and then? Of course. It's fun for him, but it's not necessary.

Part 5: Replacing Unproductive Behaviors with Productive Behaviors and Dealing with the Extinction Burst

BEHAVIOR CHANGE: Do you want a behavior to STOP? If so, you want to *extinguish* it. Let's talk about *extinction*, *replacement behaviors*, and the *extinction burst*.

Many autism parents fervently wish that their children would stop performing certain undesired behaviors (bolting, tantrumming, screaming, hair-pulling, and so forth). Frustratingly enough, when parents ask, "How do I stop Behavior Q?" the answer is, "Reinforce an alternative behavior." In other words, replace Behavior Q with another behavior.

This means, instead of reacting to Behavior Q, pay attention to and give reinforcement for another behavior – a behavior that you like. You put Behavior Q on *extinction*. Instead of reacting to Behavior Q, you will now focus on Behavior R -- the new replacement behavior. Behavior R is a behavior that will help your child at home, at school, or in the community.

We'll discuss this further in this chapter.



35. What is Extinction? Answer: A way to decrease a behavior by taking away whatever has been reinforcing it.

Extinction is a specific procedure. After determining which factors in the environment are maintaining a behavior (keeping it going), the parents/instructor take away those reinforcing factors. For example, if a child consistently received attention for screaming, the parents no longer react to screaming. Screaming behavior has been put on “extinction.”

Extinction is a process of withholding reinforcement from an undesired behavior, so that the behavior decreases and is extinguished. Since it is a process, it takes some time. Also, there are points to keep in mind:

- Decide upon a replacement behavior *before you start*
- Be aware that you may see an *extinction burst*
- Be prepared to deal with an extinction burst *by sticking with the program*

Keep in mind that extinction bursts are hard on you and hard on the child and so this approach should be used sparingly. It's best to teach the replacement behavior so that the child has another skill to fall back on when they don't get what they want by hitting, screaming etc. In this example, you would work on polite asking, or pointing for a non-verbal child so that the child has an acceptable way to ask for what they want.

Behavior Basics 2 #36

A replacement behavior is a new productive behavior that will be reinforced and that will replace the behavior that is on extinction.

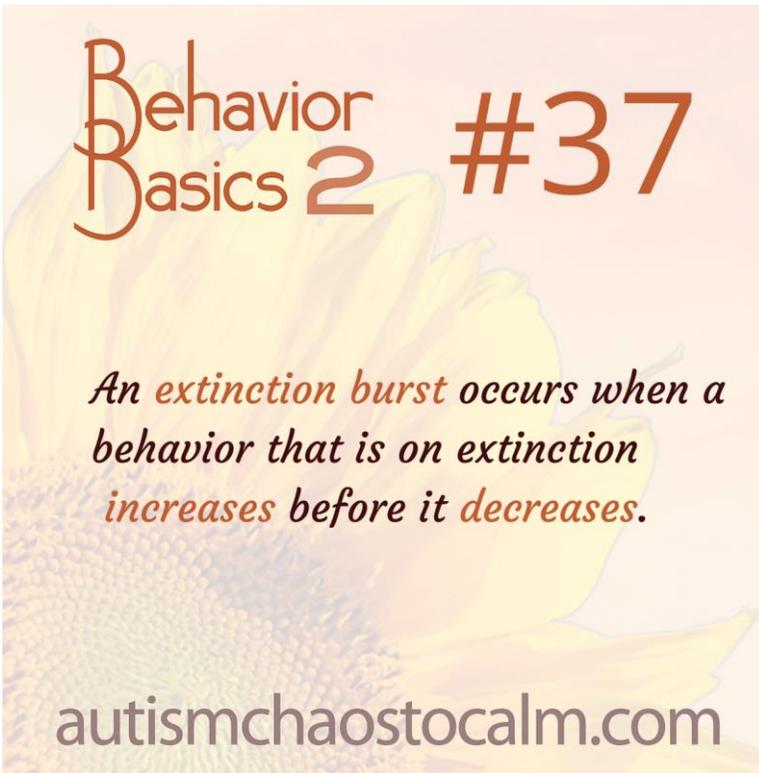
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36. What is a replacement behavior? Answer: The new productive behavior that will be reinforced and that will replace the behavior on extinction.

You have decided that you want Behavior Q to stop. What would you like the child to do instead of Behavior Q? This new behavior is the *replacement behavior*. It is the behavior that you will pay attention to and that you will reinforce at every opportunity. You would like the child to perform this behavior more often.

A replacement behavior should be something the child can do and that you would like to see more often. It should be something that is functional (helpful to the child) or can be built up into a more functional behavior. Put some thought into selecting a helpful replacement behavior.

For example, to replace screaming behavior, you may wish to select Quiet Mouth or Appropriate Vocalization as replacement behaviors. To replace running-in-the-house behavior, you may wish to select Slow Steps as a replacement behavior.



37. The Extinction Twist: Beware of the Extinction Burst – the behavior you want to extinguish suddenly increases!

You've made the decision. Behavior Q will be put on extinction and replaced. Accordingly, you stop paying attention to Behavior Q and start paying attention to and reinforcing the functional replacement behavior--Behavior R. As expected, with reinforcement you see Behavior R increase; that's nice because it is a productive behavior.

Suddenly, you notice that old Behavior Q is escalating!

Wow, what happened? Behavior Q was supposed to *decrease*, not increase. The reason that Behavior Q escalates, despite the lack of attention and reinforcement, is due to a scientific phenomenon known as the *extinction burst*.

During the extinction burst, a behavior briefly escalates before it decreases.

BEHAVIOR CHANGE: The Extinction Twist: Beware of the Extinction Burst -- it can take you by surprise!

The extinction burst can create doubt and concern in parents or an instructor. They may feel that they are doing something wrong, the child is doing something wrong, or that the positive reinforcement approach is not working. This feeling is understandable.

When the parents know in advance that an extinction burst will probably happen, they will be prepared and will recognize it when it happens.

When old Behavior Q flares up, the parents will know that this is just something that happens during the behavior change process. Even though it can be upsetting, the extinction burst means that old Behavior Q is on the way out the door.

Behavior Basics 2 #38

An extinction burst happens because the child is trying to regain his “lost” reinforcement by increasing his old behavior.

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38. The Extinction Burst: Why does it happen? Answer: The child is trying to regain his “lost” reinforcement by intensifying his old behavior.

Why does this happen? Let’s look at this question from the point of view of a child with autism. The child engages in Behavior Q because he experiences reinforcement for it. Even if we don’t understand what that reinforcement is or how it is happening, the laws of behavioral science tell us that Behavior Q was happening because it was being reinforced.

Suddenly the child is no longer getting reinforcement for Behavior Q! He quickly perceives that his reinforcement environment is changing. He liked Behavior Q because he got reinforcement for it, and now he is lacking his accustomed reinforcement. Like many children with

autism, he prefers a predictable environment, and suddenly his environment is no longer predictable in regards to Behavior Q. What does this determined little child do in response? He tries to get that predictable reinforcement back. He escalates Behavior Q. He will try for a while to get back his accustomed reinforcement for Behavior Q.

With time, he will realize that Behavior Q is failing to deliver reinforcement, but hey, Behavior R is delivering a lot of reinforcement. Soon he will switch his focus to Behavior R. Success! Behavior Q is gone and Behavior R is increasing.



39. The Extinction Burst: What to do about it? Answer: Keep going. It's actually good news.

What to do? Keep going with the program to reinforce Behavior R. The extinction burst is actually good news. It means that Behavior Q is on the road to decreasing. Soon Behavior Q will be history. Keep working on Behavior R, and start looking around for another behavior to add to the reinforcement list.

Persevere. Keep it up. Remember the facts. Behavior Q will fade away. Behavior R will increase.

Your child has learned a new skill.

You have learned how to decrease an undesired behavior, increase a desired behavior, and cope with the disturbing and unsettling experience of an Extinction Burst.

Congratulations!

Part 6: How to do Planned Ignoring of Undesired Behaviors



40. Attention can be a reinforcer. Attention can strengthen a behavior.

It is easy for a parent or instructor to react to disruptive behavior by paying attention to it or perhaps offering a treat or giving a privilege (with the hope of making the disruptive behavior stop). The attention and treat are gratifying to the child, so the child performs the disruptive behavior more often!

Remember the simple rule, behavior which receives parental attention is behavior that will be strengthened.

Behavior Basics 2 #41

Planned Ignoring is when you ignore the undesired behavior, not the child.

Give attention and reinforcement for appropriate replacement behaviors.

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41. How to do planned ignoring: Ignore the undesired behavior, not the child. Give attention and reinforcement for appropriate replacement behaviors.

Do not react to the undesired behavior. Make a plan to pay attention to a desired replacement behavior. When the child performs Disruptive Behavior X, the parent or instructor will ignore (not react to) the disruptive behavior and instead, will pay attention to another more productive behavior. Make a list of all possible alternative productive behaviors that the child can perform, and reinforce those. Post the list of desirable alternative behaviors in strategic locations around the house or the classroom as reminders.

If the disruptive behavior is dangerous or destructive, intervene immediately to stop it, re-direct immediately to another activity, then go back reinforcing acceptable behaviors.

BEHAVIOR CHANGE: Planned ignoring of behavior and attending to other behaviors is easy with TAGteach.

The easiest way to ignore undesired behavior is to pay lots of attention to other, desired behaviors. With TAGteach it is easy to “tag” and reinforce even the smallest muscle movement at the precise moment that it happens. Since it is easy to tag quickly and often, it is easier for the parent/instructor to focus on new, desirable behaviors. Since the new behaviors are being precisely and intensely marked and reinforced, the child will quickly learn to perform them more often.

“Virtually all children, in the course of the day, will do or say something that is worth selecting out for reinforcement. Soon, selectively reinforcing appropriate behavior will become second nature to you.” Dr. Glenn Latham, *The Power of Positive Parenting*, p. 55.

Part 7: Teaching Behaviors in New Settings

REVIEW OF BEHAVIOR BUILDING PROCESS: Assess Learner, Do Task Analysis, Set Tag Points, Teach via Back Chaining, Use Continuous Reinforcement to Build behavior, Use Variable Reinforcement to Maintain Behavior

Remember to observe and assess your learner and analyze the task to be taught. The learner's skill levels should match the steps in the task. If the learner cannot perform certain tag points, step back and teach those necessary skills, then continue on with the teaching process.

Use the successful approach of back chaining to teach: teach the last step first! Reinforce the child every time he or she performs the tag point correctly; this is how to "build" a behavior.

Once the child has learned the behavior, switch from continuous reinforcement to variable reinforce to "maintain" the behavior (keep it going). Remember the tip for the best way to go to variable reinforcement: reinforce only the very best examples of the behavior!

Behavior Basics 2 #42

*Once a child's behavior is **reliable** at home, the child needs to be **taught** how to do behaviors in **new settings**.*

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- 42. Child needs to be taught how to do behaviors in new setting. Example: child puts on swim suit at home, then at aunt's house, then at pool.**

Often we teach a child a skill in the most familiar setting: the home, backyard, or classroom. A child must learn to perform his or her new skills in many settings, and generally this “transfer” of skills to new environments is something else we have to teach.

To do this, repeat the initial teaching process in the new setting. Reinforce the same tag points used to teach the skill and add any new ones as appropriate.

SKILL TRANSFER: Assess Child's Performance of Desired Behavior in Home Setting: Is behavior reliable?

If the child routinely performs the new behavior and only needs occasional reinforcement, the behavior is reliable. This child is ready to transfer her new skill to a new setting.

If the child is hesitant or confused, and the behavior still needs lots of positive reinforcement, the behavior is not yet reliable. This child is not yet ready to work on this skill in a new setting.

Behavior Basics 2 #43

When teaching a child to perform a behavior in new settings, start in familiar setting and gradually move to less familiar settings.

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- 43. Select a location to try new behavior that is familiar to child, but not where she previously learned it. Start in familiar setting and gradually move to less familiar settings.**

It is always helpful to work on transitioning skills to new settings in small steps. For example, if the child always put on her bathing suit in her bedroom, can she put it on in another bedroom or in the living room? She may need more time, more positive reinforcement, or even some extra teaching to perform this task in another room.

When she can reliably perform the task in different rooms of her own house, take her to another familiar location (family or friend's home), and repeat the process. When she can do this task reliably in these settings, take her to the pool and teach her to change in the locker

room. Again, she may need more time, reinforcement and teaching to manage everything in this new location.

When she can happily run into the locker room and change into her bathing suit, she will have a wonderful new skill.

Behavior Basics 2 #44

*When teaching a child to perform a behavior in a new setting, **assess** whether they can do all of the **steps** in the new setting.*

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44. Assess Child's Performance of All Steps in Process in New Setting: Can she do *all of the steps* in new setting?

The child may not be able to do all of the steps of the process in the new setting. A step that was easy at home may be difficult in another place. She will need support and reinforcement to perform this step in the new setting.

In the case above, of teaching a child to put on a swim suit in different settings, the child may have to do some additional behaviors such as placing clothes and shoes in the pool bag and pulling out a towel. Set tag points accordingly and tag and reinforce every time the child performs them.

Behavior Basics 2 #45

*When teaching a child to perform a behavior in a new setting, **assess** whether they can perform for the necessary **length of time** in the new setting.*

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45. Assess Child's Endurance in Performing Behavior In New Setting: Can she perform for the *length of time* necessary?

The distractions of a new setting may affect her ability to do the behavior for as *long* as is necessary to complete it. She will need support and reinforcement to keep up her endurance and work through the entire chain of steps.

Behavior Basics 2 #46

*When teaching a child to perform a behavior in a new setting, **assess** whether they can perform at their **previous level of reinforcement**.*

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46. Assess Child's Endurance in Performing Behavior In New Setting: Can she perform at her *previous level* of reinforcement?

The child may need a higher rate of reinforcement, or more potent reinforcers to complete the behavior in the new setting. Once she masters the behavior in the new setting, the reinforcement can be faded back to the previous level.

Behavior Basics 2 #47

*When the child has **mastered** a behavior in one new setting, teach it in a different setting. When child can do behavior in 3 or 4 settings **reliably**, it is a good **strong** behavior.*

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47. When child has mastered behavior in one new setting, teach it in a different setting. When child can do behavior in 3 or 4 settings reliably, it is a good strong behavior.

It is a great achievement when a child can perform a desired behavior in multiple settings. Once she can generalize one skill to multiple settings, start work on another skill.

Observe and assess the child, break down the skills into achievable tag points, study each new environment carefully and make adjustments accordingly. Once a child has learned to transfer a few skills to multiple environments, he or she will learn this skill more quickly each time.

Part 8: Knowing When to Stop

Always stop teaching at the point of success!

When things are going well, STOP!

This is hard for parents to do. We see things are going well, so we push harder. We always have to watch ourselves so that we don't create situations that are too much for child.



48. Stop when the child has achieved success.

When the child has achieved a few tag points, STOP!

You want the child to feel successful and you want the child to feel that her limits are respected. When she experiences success and is not stretched beyond her endurance, she will feel trust in the teaching process.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP: Stop when things are going well.

When you see your child achieve several tag points and you have the feeling that all is going well, STOP!

Children with autism are extremely sensitive to their environments and all parents/instructors know how things can change in a flash. Asking for the child to do just one more thing can be too much, and can trigger feelings of fatigue or restlessness.

Don't take this risk. When everyone is feeling happy and successful, STOP! Claim the victory and continue at another time.

KNOWING WHEN TO STOP: Hard for Parents/Instructors To Do!

Stopping, especially when things seem to be going well, is hard for parents and instructors. This is only natural. Parents are constantly aware of the passage of time, and want children to learn as much as possible. Instructors often have only a set amount of time, often a half-hour or 45 minutes, and feel responsible to cram as much into that time slot as possible.

These feelings are natural. Yet, it is better to stop before the child becomes agitated. Agitated time is lost time.

It's helpful to remember that with TAGteach it is easy to continue teaching (by tagging and reinforcing) when a "structured" or "scheduled" teaching session can no longer be done. If a child in a 45

minute session peters out after 23 minutes, the instructor can let the child play, or even wander around, and continue to tag and reinforce any appropriate play, communicative or interactive behaviors.

TAGteach time is always productive time.

Part 9: What to do when behaviors deteriorate or disappear



49. Lack of opportunity and lack of reinforcement

Any child may forget a behavior or not do it as well as before. This is usually due to lack of opportunities to do the behavior and/or lack of reinforcement when the child does it.

In the example above of putting on a swim suit, it's easy to understand that this skill may weaken over the course of the winter.

Or, a child may resume disruptive behaviors at the grocery store because he is not getting the reinforcement he needs to maintain behaviors like Safe Walking and Hands On Cart.

In either case, the solution is to go back, re-teach the tag points and re-introduce positive reinforcement for desired behaviors.



50. Re-teach Previous Tag Points

If a child has trouble with a behavior that she could do previously, simply go back and re-teach it with the tag points used previously. Tag and reinforce the child for each step in the process. This will bring the behavior back quickly.

Use continuous reinforcement to build the behavior back up and switch to variable reinforcement when the child is doing the behavior reliably. When switching to a variable schedule, look out for the best examples of the behavior and reinforce only those superior examples.

Behavior Basics 2 #51

If a behavior deteriorates check reinforcement schedules; make sure that the behavior is still being reinforced some of the time.

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51. Check Reinforcement Schedules

Once the child has re-learned a behavior, it's important to make sure she continues to experience reinforcement for that behavior. If a behavior is not reinforced it will dwindle away.

Surprisingly, the best way to keep a behavior going (once it has been learned), is to reinforce it every now and then. This is known as "Variable Reinforcement."

An easy way to do Variable Reinforcement is to tag and reinforce only the best examples of the behavior. This will naturally create a variable reinforcement schedule. This will accustom the child to performing the behavior at her best level.

Part 10: Conclusion

BEHAVIOR BUILDING CHECKLIST: Download the free Behavior Building Checklist from the Chaos to Calm website. The checklist has lines to write down the tag points, skill requirements, and reinforcers to be used to build a skill.

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Behavior Basic Final

"Science is at its best when it's simple and effective." From Seany Pogson - Autism Parent and TAGteacher

CONCLUSION

Congratulations on working your way through this book. You now have the information you need to help your child learn new skills.

The process described here is based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). The principles of positive reinforcement and the use of reinforcement schedule are how all living things learn.

You now know how to use science to create solutions for your child in your own home.

Resources and Additional Information

Learn how to use TAGteach to teach many skills and functional behaviors to a child with autism with the book by Martha Gabler: **Autism Chaos to Calm - Discovering Solutions to the Everyday Problems of Living with Autism:**

<http://goo.gl/vm7dgX>

Read articles and download free resources from Martha at her website: <http://autismchaostocalm.com/>

Learn more about TAGteach for autism:

<http://tagteach.com/Autism and Special Education>

Watch a free video series from Martha:

<https://tagteachblog.com/martha-parent-video-series/>

Take Martha's online course

<https://tagteach.com/TAGteach-for-Autism-Online-Course>

Take a FREE online course on TAGteach Fundamentals:

<https://tagteach.com/Free-TAGteach-course>