

Facilitator's Guide



Take Flight

Empowering educators and
equipping learners with ASD to soar



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**Reinforcement
and Reinforcers**

Take Flight Facilitator's Guide

Reinforcement Part 1: Reinforcement & Reinforcers

Activity #1:

- Have participants view the Take Flight video, "The Power of Reinforcement Part 1: Reinforcement & Reinforcers."
- Have participants complete the accompanying "Reinforcer or Reward" activity.

Activity #2:

Questions for Discussion and Further Examination

1. How does reinforcement work?
2. What are the key characteristics of effective reinforcement?
3. What are the differences between the following terms/procedures:
 - a. reinforcement vs. reward?
 - b. reinforcement vs. bribery?
 - c. reinforcement vs. reinforcer?
4. What are some examples of planned reinforcement in everyday situations and interactions you may have experienced or observed?
5. What are some examples of unplanned reinforcement in everyday situations and interactions you may have experienced or observed?
6. Identify and discuss several reasons why an understanding of reinforcement is important when supporting learners in an inclusive educational context.
7. How would you respond to a colleague who says they do not believe in using reinforcement?

Activity #3:

Case Examples for Consideration:

Read each of the following scenarios and identify whether each one is an example of

- A. Positive reinforcement
- B. Negative reinforcement
- C. Not reinforcement at all (unknown procedure)

As you examine each situation, ask yourself

- Was something added (positive) or was something removed (negative)?
- Did the behaviour increase (reinforcement) or not (unknown procedure)?



1. Jake is a grade 4 learner who really likes school. He gets so excited that he frequently shouts out the answer when his teacher asks a question. Each time this happens, the teacher reminds Jake that he needs to raise his hand if he knows the answer so other boys and girls will have time to think about their answers and have a chance to share as well. She waits for Jake to raise his hand, and then she calls on him to share his answer. She also provides lots of praise when Jake remembers to raise his hand without being reminded. Jake is starting to raise his hand more often when he wants to answer a question.
2. Priya doesn't like to read, but she is supposed to read for at least 15 minutes each night as part of her homework. Priya loves to be physically active and play outside, doing activities like riding her bike and jumping on the trampoline in her backyard. In order to encourage Priya to do her reading homework without arguing and complaining, Priya's mom tells her that as soon as she does her 15 minutes of reading she can go outside and play for a half hour. Priya continues to complain while doing her reading homework each night, and then goes outside to play.
3. Alex is a high school student who finds writing tasks difficult. He often says that he doesn't know what to write and has a hard time getting his thoughts down on paper. In English class, Alex used to do some work with help and prompting from the teacher, but now he often sits with his head on his desk and does not complete his work most days. The teacher has started to notice that Alex spends more and more time with his head down on his desk during class.
4. Julia is a learner with ASD who has just started school this year. Although she received Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI) services, she still has limited communication skills. One of the priorities for her educational program is to increase her ability to request things that she wants or needs. In order to encourage Julia to make as many requests as possible throughout the day, every time she makes a request, staff will honour that request by giving her the requested item or activity, as long as it is possible and acceptable in the school setting. Their efforts are paying off, as Julia is beginning to make more requests.
5. Mr. Marcus had organized a series of professional learning workshops for staff at his school. The workshops were scheduled to take place each Wednesday from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m., and staff were invited, but not required, to attend. On the first Wednesday, attendees spent some time on the activities that Mr. Marcus had developed for the workshop, but they also spent a great deal of time talking about other topics and were frequently off-task. About half way through the workshop, Mr. Marcus told the participants that there were two more activities to be completed during that session, and if the group finished those, everyone would be able to go home earlier than scheduled. The attendees focused on the tasks and were able to finish the training ten minutes ahead of schedule. During each subsequent Wednesday workshop, attendees worked to complete the activities efficiently to see if they could finish each session ahead of the scheduled end time.



Activity #4:

In small groups, review the Potential Reinforcer Checklist located in the Learning Guide that accompanies *The Power of Reinforcement Part 1: Reinforcement & Reinforcers*.

After reviewing the Potential Reinforcer Checklist:

- A. Brainstorm a list of additional items that may function as reinforcers for a learner or learners you know (be sure to maintain privacy and confidentiality).
- B. Brainstorm a list of items that may function as reinforcers for members of your group.
- C. Discuss with your group how you might use some of those items/activities to increase desired behaviours in your context.
- D. Discuss with your group some of the important considerations in deciding which types of reinforcers may be appropriate for your setting and the individual(s) with whom you work.



Take Flight Facilitator's Guide – ANSWER KEY

Reinforcement Part 1: Reinforcement & Reinforcers

Activity #1:

Answers for the “Reinforcer or Reward” activity are embedded within the activity.

Activity #2:

1. Reinforcement is the procedure in which a certain **consequence follows a behaviour**, and the result is that **the behaviour increases in the future**. The behaviour may happen more often, or for longer periods of time, or with a higher level of intensity. Any behaviour that keeps happening is being reinforced in some way, even if we don't know what the reinforcer is, and even if we can't see anything in particular happening after the behaviour. A behaviour that is not reinforced in some way does not continue.
2. A) You must identify something, or a number of things, that will actually **function as a reinforcer**. Just because an individual likes something, does not mean that it will be a reinforcer.

B) The reinforcer must be delivered as a result of the desired behaviour, and **ONLY** as a result of the desired behaviour. In this way, the reinforcer is “**contingent**” on the desired behaviour occurring.

C) The reinforcer has to be delivered **immediately** - within fractions of a second - when the desired behaviour happens. If there's a delay between the learner's behaviour and delivery of the reinforcer, it might not be clear to the learner what behaviour you want him to do, or he may not make the connection between the desired behaviour and the consequence.

D) Reinforcement should also be **varied**. You need to switch things up and not use the same reinforcer over and over because there's a risk that it will lose its effectiveness if you use it too often or too many times in a row.



3. **A) reinforcement vs. reward:**

Reinforcement involves delivering a consequence following a behaviour to increase the likelihood that the behaviour will happen in the future. When reinforcement is used in an intentional and effective way, the behaviours that are targeted for increase are behaviours that will benefit the learner and help them become more independent; participate more successfully at school, in home, or in community; and improve their quality of life. A reward, on the other hand, may benefit the individual receiving it, but it may not have any effect at all on future behaviour.

B) reinforcement vs. bribery:

Reinforcement involves delivering a consequence following a behaviour to increase the likelihood that the behaviour will happen in the future. When reinforcement is used in an intentional and effective way, the behaviours that are targeted for increase are behaviours that will benefit the learner and help them become more independent; participate more successfully at school, in home, or in community; and improve their quality of life. By contrast, bribery involves offering something to someone to convince them to do something that will benefit the person doing the bribing.

C) reinforcement vs. reinforcer:

Reinforcement refers the **procedure** of delivering a consequence immediately following a behaviour, with the result being an increase in the frequency, duration, or intensity of that behaviour in the future. **A reinforcer is the consequence** (item, activity, etc.) that is delivered following the specific behaviour, and that causes an increase in the behaviour in the future.

4. Responses will vary

5. Responses will vary

6. Responses will vary

7. Responses will vary

Activity #3:

1. Jake:

a. What is the behaviour of interest in the scenario?

Hand-raising

b. Was something added or taken away?

Added (positive) – teacher calls on Jake (attention) and provides praise

c. Did the behaviour increase?

Yes (reinforcement)

d. What was the procedure?

Positive reinforcement



2. Priya:

- a. What is the behaviour of interest in the scenario?
Reading without arguing and complaining
- b. Was something added or taken away?
Added (positive) – the opportunity to go outside and play
- c. Did the behaviour increase?
No (not reinforcement)
- d. What was the procedure?
Unknown – no observable effect on the behaviour of interest

3. Alex:

- a. What is the behaviour of interest in the scenario?
Head down on desk during English class
- b. Was something added or taken away?
Taken away (negative) – work does not have to be completed
- c. Did the behaviour increase?
Yes – Alex spends more time with his head on his desk (reinforcement)
- d. What was the procedure?
Negative reinforcement

4. Julia:

- a. What is the behaviour of interest in the scenario?
Requesting
- b. Was something added or taken away?
Added (positive) – the requested item/activity
- c. Did the behaviour increase?
Yes (reinforcement)
- d. What was the procedure?
Positive reinforcement

5. Mr. Marcus:

- a. What is the behaviour of interest in the scenario?
Completing the workshop activities
- b. Was something added or taken away?
Taken away (negative) – 10 minutes of work time
- c. Did the behaviour increase?
Yes (reinforcement)
- d. What was the procedure?
Negative reinforcement



Activity #4:

- A. Responses will vary.
- B. Responses will vary.
- C. Responses will vary.
- D. Responses will vary; however, it may be valuable to consider some of the following:
 - Are there any potential safety issues involved?
 - What should you do if a potential reinforcer causes too much excitement for the learner?
 - Is the use of edible reinforcers acceptable in the specific setting?





The Autism in Education (AIE) Partnership is an inter-provincial collaboration of the Departments of Education & Early Childhood Development / Early Learning & Culture of the four Atlantic Provinces. Created as a new initiative of the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) in 2010, the AIE Partnership provides support to educational personnel working with students with ASD across the Atlantic region and facilitates the sharing of information and expertise among stakeholders. Priorities of the AIE Partnership include:

- Research to clarify and articulate standards of practice in the area of Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Dissemination of information and current research on issues of concern among the four Atlantic Provinces
- Professional development and learning opportunities for educational staff, partner professionals, and families



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