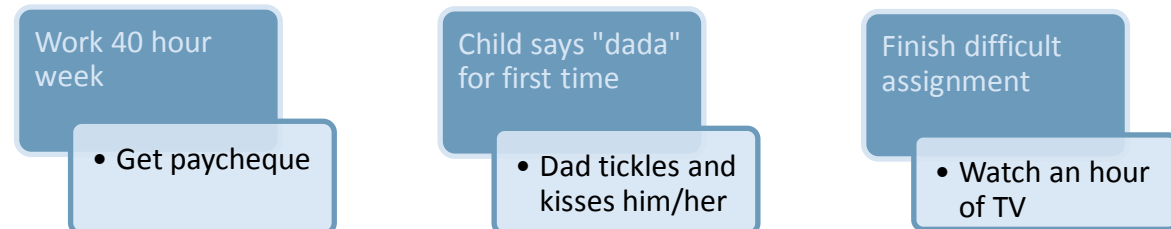


# Reinforcement

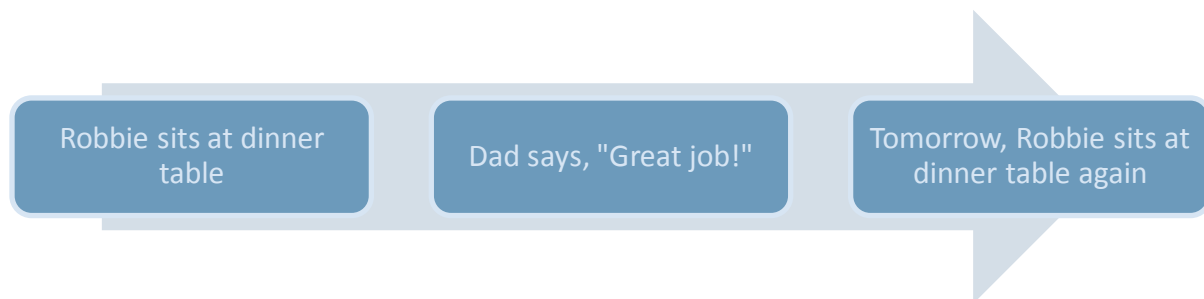
Reinforcement: when something desirable is added, or something unpleasant is removed, right after a behaviour. It makes it more likely the behaviour will happen again in the future whenever there is a similar situation.



## The Key to Reinforcement

Just because someone likes an activity or item, does not mean the item or activity is a reinforcer. **It is only a reinforcer if we see the behaviour continue to happen (increase).** If the behaviour stops or does not increase, the item or activity may not be a reinforcer, or may not be a reinforcer in that specific situation or at that specific time.

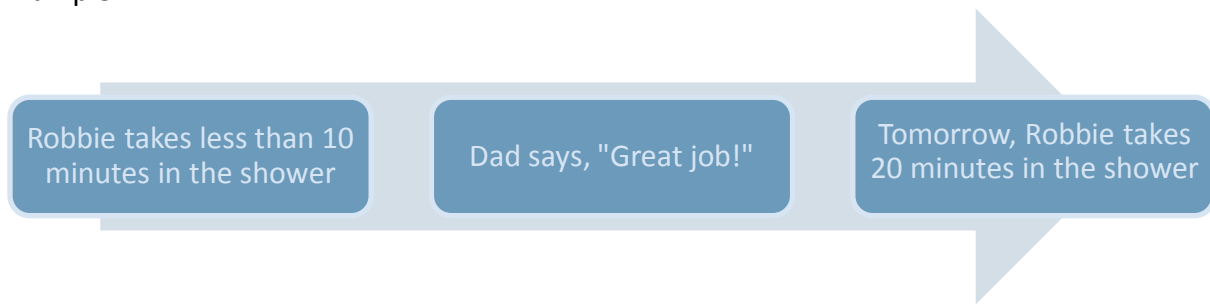
Example 1



In this example, we can assume Robbie's dad saying "great job!" **was reinforcing** because Robbie sat at the dinner table again the next day.

***We help kids be kids!***

## Example 2



In this example, we can assume Robbie’s dad saying “great job!” was **not** reinforcing, as Robbie took a long shower the next day.

## Important Rules to Follow (ABC’S)

**A**fter: given **immediately** after the behaviour

**B**rief: amount of time with reinforcer equal to effort required by child/youth

**C**ontingent: reinforcer **should not** be provided unless child does requested behaviour

**S**pecific: use enthusiastic voice, and comment on **exact behaviour** (“great job holding my hand!”)

## Reinforcement is Different for Everyone

People are reinforced in different ways. For example, what might you do after finishing a work assignment? Maybe you take a short break and buy a coffee and donut. However, your co-worker Tom might play a game on his phone.

## How to Determine Potential Reinforcers

Reinforcers can change from hour-to-hour, and even minute-to-minute. Something that is highly reinforcing today might not be tomorrow.

To find out what might reinforce your child/youth:

- **Observe:** watch and write down things your child/youth enjoys playing with or doing
- **Survey:** ask what he/she wants. If language is limited, show options and have him/her choose.

- **Preference assessment:** this involves letting your child choose between one or more items that could be used as reinforcers
- **Ask others:** teachers, babysitters, siblings, other family members, might have ideas on what the child/youth enjoys

*Remember, just because a child enjoys something, doesn't mean it will reinforce behaviour. Don't be discouraged if it takes a while to find something that works!*

## When “Reinforcement” Is Not Working

By definition, reinforcement always works, because it involves a behaviour increasing in the future. Sometimes people say, “Reinforcement doesn't work for my child!” What they really mean is, “I'm doing what I *think* is reinforcing and it isn't working. I will try something different”.

### Satiation

Sometimes a person can like something a lot, but it might no longer be reinforcing if he/she has too much of it. This is called **satiation**. Your teenager might like chips, but if that is the only item used as reinforcement, he/she will likely become less motivated by chips over time.

### Deprivation

Certain things might be more reinforcing in certain situations. **Deprivation** is when we have a strong desire for a reinforcer because we haven't had it in a while. You will be more reinforced by a big glass of water if you are thirsty.

## When “Bad” Behaviours Increase

Remember, if a behaviour is increasing, it is being reinforced. Sometimes children/youth do behaviours we do not want to see increase, like crying, screaming, tugging, running away or whining. If these behaviours are increasing, consider what might be reinforcing that behaviour. A child who wants attention might be reinforced by you saying, “Stop whining!” even if you feel like you are not giving them anything positive.

**Services and supports offered in partnership with:**

