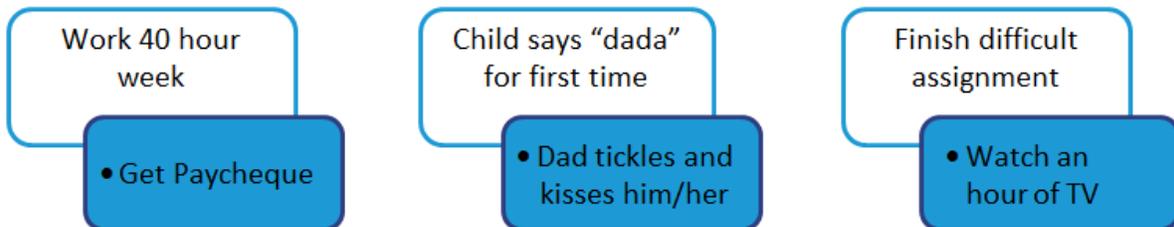


# Using Rewards: Reinforcement

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.

## 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)

**After:** given **immediately** after the behaviour

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

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

**Specific:** 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.

Want to learn more? Call to see how else we can help.

**1-866-590-8822, press 1** to book a meeting today!



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