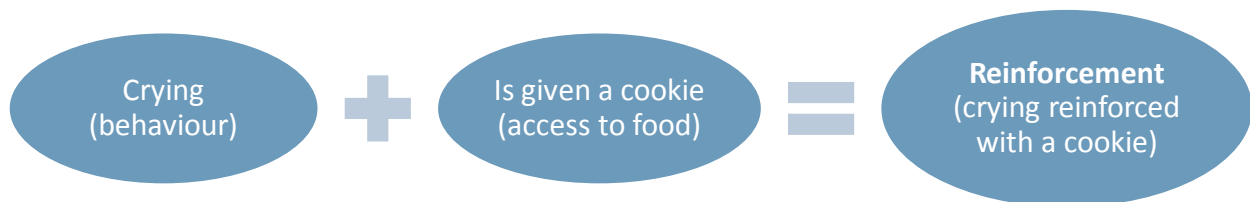


# Extinction

Extinction: when you **consistently** stop giving reinforcement for a specific behaviour that you have been reinforcing.

- Extinction is used to decrease behaviour.
- First, you need to know **why** the behaviour is happening (read Info Sheet – Functions of Behaviour).

Example 1: Alicia cries whenever she sees and wants a cookie. She cries, and is then given a cookie.



Why is Alicia crying? Because when Alicia cries, she is rewarded with the cookie she wanted.

Remember, extinction is when you withhold reinforcement. If extinction was used with Alicia, this is how it may look:



## The Key to Extinction

This extinction process **MUST** be done consistently over time. If done correctly, Alicia will not cry when she wants the cookie because crying no longer gets reinforced by a cookie. If Alicia's parents *sometimes* still give Alicia a cookie when she cries for one, she will become confused and the behaviour will continue.

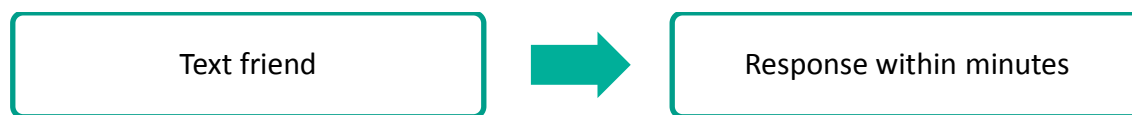
***We help kids be kids!***

## An Important Warning about Extinction

The **short term effect** of using extinction is the behaviour will temporarily increase before it decreases. This is known as extinction **burst**. The behaviour could get worse before it gets better.

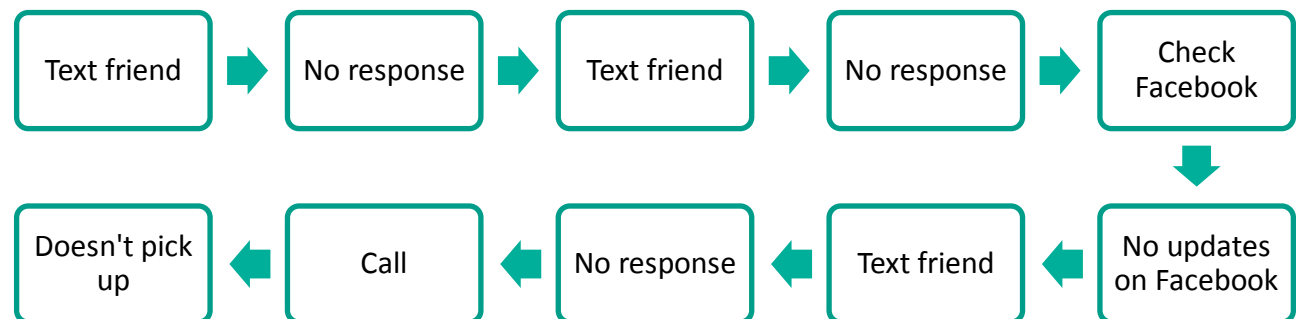
The child/youth does not know *why* you are no longer giving what you used to give when he/she did the behaviour. He/she may also try other things to get what they want (e.g., hitting, screaming, yelling).

Think of a time you didn't get reinforced when you usually do. Let's say you have a friend who always responds to your text messages within minutes. This is normally what happens when you text your friend:



Usually you do one behaviour (text) and you are reinforced (you get a response).

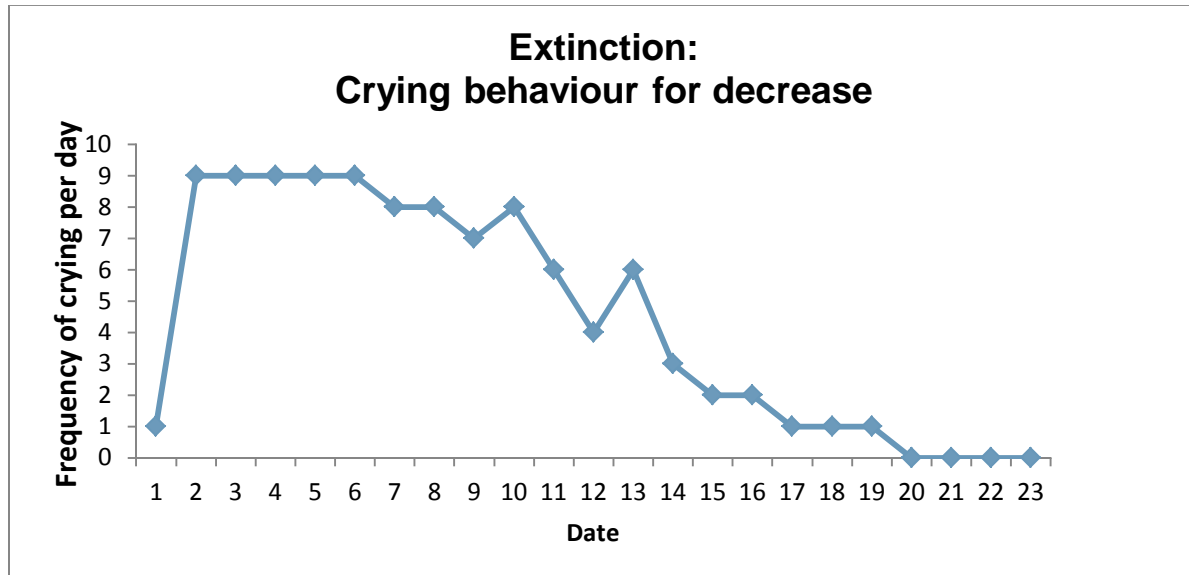
However, let's say you send her a text asking if she wants to go out for coffee. You don't hear back from her. You send her another text. You still don't get a response. You check Facebook to see if she is online or if she posted about being anywhere important. There is no information there that helps you. You send her another text. You still don't get a response, and now you are starting to get worried. You decide to call her (gasp! Talking on the phone!). She doesn't pick up. Twenty minutes later, your friend calls you back and says she was driving so she couldn't respond to your messages. This is what happened:



Since you weren't initially reinforced when you text your friend like normal, you did **MANY** other behaviours. **Since your friend always responds quickly (reinforcing your behaviour), you had an extinction burst when you didn't get a response.** You increased your frequency of texting, and you did other behaviours you wouldn't normally do (e.g., checking Facebook, calling, texting another friend).

If you originally sent a text message to a friend who always takes a long time to respond, it is not likely you would have done all these extra behaviours. The reason you did all these things is because you were used to being reinforced quickly by this friend.

This graph shows a visual of the potential extinction burst for Alicia:



## Extinction versus Ignoring

Extinction is not the same as ignoring.

- Extinction is when you don't give reinforcement for a behaviour *on purpose*
  - you must know **what** is reinforcing the behaviour
- Ignoring is when you don't give your child/youth attention when he/she is doing something you don't like or are seeking your attention in an inappropriate way
  - This would only decrease the behaviour if the child/youth was doing the behaviour for your attention
  - For example, if a child/youth bites his/her arm for sensory feedback, ignoring will not decrease arm biting

## Common Mistakes

- Not figuring out **why** the behaviour was/is happening (i.e., not figuring out the function of the behaviour)
- Not preparing for the temporary increase in behaviour
- Giving in during extinction burst
- Not being consistent
- Using extinction when someone else could get hurt or increase in the behaviour may harm the individual
- Accidentally reinforcing the behaviour
- Reinforcing a less desirable behaviour

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

