

# Learning Together



## Specialized Services At Your Fingertips

## IN THIS ISSUE

### What Is Reinforcement?

Hello and welcome to the second edition of our newsletter. In this edition we will be discussing our favourite topic—reinforcement!

Reinforcement is how people learn and change their behaviour. In learning what reinforcement is and how to use it, we can become better at helping our individuals improve skills in their settings.

**Reinforcement** is what happens just after a behaviour occurs, which strengthens it! When a behaviour is reinforced, it happens more often. For example, you praise an individual just as he finishes washing the fruit from the grocery store. If washing fruit happens more often, then you've *reinforced* it! Praise would be the *reinforcer*.

Reinforcement should occur immediately after the behaviour you're trying to reinforce.

Example: Praising an individual for social distancing while on a walk hours later may be a nice thing to do, but it may not reinforce (i.e. increase) the social distancing. It may instead reinforce other behaviours that have happened since the walk.

Problem behaviours may also be reinforced! Johnny loves talking to staff, when Johnny gets too close (within 2 meters) to a community member on a walk, staff talk to him more than usual. Johnny may start to get into community member's space more often. Be careful how you react!

*Keep in mind: Everyone likes different things – what may be reinforcing for one person may not be reinforcing for another*

### How to Provide Reinforcement

1. Identify the behaviour you are trying to increase - this becomes the target
  - This should be something you can see and describe, e.g., sitting at the table with hands down on their lap
2. Choose reinforcers you will use
3. Watch for the target behaviour
4. Deliver reinforcer **immediately** upon occurrence of the target behaviour.

#### What to do

Every time Julie sneezes into her elbow, we smile at her and say, "Great covering your sneeze". Over the next two weeks she goes from sneezing into her elbow rarely to every time.

Smiling at and praising Julie is then reinforcing her sneezing into her elbow.

#### What not to do

You want Maria to wash her hands after every meal. You know that praise is particularly reinforcing for Maria. You notice that she washes her hands after eating, but you don't say anything right away because you are busy. A few minutes later when she's leaving the kitchen, you tell her, "Thanks for washing your hands, Maria".

*What went wrong here Jimmy?*

[Click here to see a demonstration of reinforcement from our friends at The Big Bang Theory.](#)

- 1 What Is Reinforcement?
- 2 How to Provide Reinforcement
- 3 Reinforcement for Each Other
- 4 Hand Washing 101
- 5 Activities at Home



Many factors affect whether reinforcement works:

How quickly does the reinforcement happen? How big is the reinforcer? How long does the reinforcer last? Is the reinforcer given every time the behaviour happens or every other time? How hard is the behaviour for the individual to perform?

If a behaviour you are trying to increase decreases, then you are likely not using a real reinforcer.



## Positive Reinforcement for Each Other

We have to remember that we all need reinforcement too! Positive reinforcement is something added to the environment that someone will work to gain again under the same circumstances. It is important to find and create reinforcers that work for each other individually.

**How To Use**

# Positive Reinforcement

- 1 Make it Personal**  
Reinforcement has to mean something to the individual receiving it in order for it to be effective.
- 2 Make it Immediate**  
The longer you wait to provide reinforcement, the less effective it is.
- 3 Make it Frequent**  
If you are using reinforcement correctly, it should always be effective. Make sure to vary the reinforcer to avoid satiation.
- 4 Make it Social**  
Any interaction without the use of gifts or tangible items will help the individual feel valued.
- 5 Make it Earned**  
Reinforcement must be contingent on an action. Be specific when labeling the behaviour you are reinforcing.

## Hand Washing 101

Looking for a way to keep the task of hand washing reinforcing and fun? Generate a personalized hand washing infographic based on your favourite song lyrics!

All you need is the song title and the artist's name. Go to [washyourlyrics.com](https://washyourlyrics.com)

### Hand-washing technique with soap and water



Create your own  
<https://washyourlyrics.com>

So Fresh, So Clean  
OutKast

Adapted from National Health Service, who adapted from the World Health Organization Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care. Created under the Open Government License. See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doi/open-government-licence/version/2/> for details.

## Activities at Home

Check out these links below for some great activities you can do while at home:

[Virtual tour of Ripley's Aquarium.](#)

[Get cooking with these recipes appropriate for all ages.](#)

[Khan academy is offering free lessons in math, science, and social studies for all ages.](#)

[Practice reading anytime, anywhere with Raz-kids.](#)

For more information and a workshops on reinforcement please visit [ConnectAbility.ca](https://connectability.ca).



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