



ABA of Wisconsin, LLC

REWARDS VS. REINFORCEMENT TIP SHEET

ISSUE

MAIN IDEA

EXAMPLES

How do I come up with possible rewards or reinforcers?

Pay attention to the individual, ultimately, what does he or she like? Then, what are you able to deliver frequently and immediately? What can you afford? Does it fit with his or her values and your values?

- ☒ Verbal or written praise (if your praise is valuable)
- ☒ Activities (great as they can be low-cost)
- ☒ Items (consumable can be better than permanent)
- ☒ Money (powerful, potentially costly)
- ☒ Not having to do something
- ☒ Time

OK, but I need concrete ideas to get going on rewards and reinforcers.

Ask -- verbally or nonverbally, in writing or orally.

- ☒ Observe when the person is exposed to items, activities, attention -- what does he or she go to first? What does he or she spend the most time with?
- ☒ List out as many activities, items, forms of attention and interaction, and "escape" from activities you can think of and as the person to rate these in preference.
- ☒ Ask him or her what they want and like.

Help! My person just threw away the "Great Job!" certificate reward.

This is a great chance to learn about what the person likes, perhaps including how they like it delivered.

- ☒ There is a good chance that rejected rewards are not actually rewards for that person.
- ☒ There is also a chance that how it was presented, or by whom, undermined the reward.
- ☒ Spend time looking at what was delivered and how -- in particular, rewards right after someone engages in a desired behavior as an alternative behavior to problem behavior, especially if they were angry or frustrated, the reward may be too closely tied to the upset at that point to be rewarding.

My reward or reinforcer stopped working.

The effects of rewards and reinforcers are not permanent, their effects change as the situation and the person change.

- ☒ People can satiate -- usually the first slice of pepperoni pizza is far better than the 15th.
- ☒ The person's beliefs and self-statements about the reward may have changed.
- ☒ The reward or reinforcer delivery may have drifted off onto the wrong behavior, or there is "bootleg" access to the reward/reinforcer.
- ☒ Something about the situation makes it confusing what behavior the reward or reinforcer is for.
- ☒ Rewards/reinforcers are too delayed.
- ☒ Make sure you've measured how often the desired behavior was happening before you started rewards, so you can detect reinforcement.

I keep giving rewards, but behavior is not improving.

You may not have reinforcement occurring.

- ☒ Make sure you are delivering rewards contingently, immediately, and in a way that clearly shows what the reward is for.
- ☒ If necessary, go back to the drawing board to try another reward.
- ☒ Consider if you have chosen the right behavior to reward: does the person do it at all, does it pass the Dead Man's Test, are there other consequences for the behavior which suppress it more than your reward elicits it?