

Autism Initiative: Training Series

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 3.2: Part 3 – Extinction

Part 1: Review of Concepts

- *Extinction* is a procedure in which a previously reinforced behavior is no longer reinforced and results in a decrease in the future occurrence of that behavior.
- When implementing an extinction procedure, it is common for behavior to temporarily increase before it decreases. This is called an *extinction burst*.
- Behavior that has decreased can also reemerge temporarily after a period of time has passed. This is called *spontaneous recovery*. It is important to remember that this occurrence is temporary and to remain consistent when implementing the extinction procedure.

Part 2: Examples and Discussion Questions

1. **Example:** Ted, an adolescent with autism does not like to go to bed. He prefers to stay up late. As bedtime approaches Ted comes up with excuses as to why he needs to stay up. For example he needs another drink, he needs to check the weather forecast for the next day etc. The staff members in the house allow Ted to complete these “forgotten” tasks. As a result, the list of “forgotten” activities needed to be completed before bedtime increases.
 - *What is reinforcing Ted’s behavior in the example described above?*
 - **Answer:** Delaying going to bed/staying up longer
 - *If the reinforcer is, delaying going to bed, how would you apply extinction to decrease Ted’s behavior?*
 - **Answer:** Do not allow Ted to complete the “forgotten tasks.” This means removing the reinforcement (delaying going to bed) that is maintaining the behavior. If Ted is no longer allowed to engage in these “forgotten” tasks he will go to bed when he is supposed to. (We could also use an activity schedule so that the “forgotten” tasks are all completed prior to Ted’s scheduled sleep time).
2. **Example:** A 12-year old adolescent with autism becomes very upset in a store when the specific brand of cereal he likes to eat is sold out. He starts screaming and yelling demanding his mother get the cereal. The mother asks the person in the store if they have any more cereal, but they are sold out. The adolescent’s screaming becomes louder, so the mother leaves the store and takes him to another store where they have the cereal, buys it for him and then returns to the first store to finish her shopping.
 - *What is reinforcing the adolescent’s behavior in the example described above?*
 - **Answer:** Leaving the store and getting the cereal

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- *If the reinforcer is, leaving the store and getting the cereal, how could the mother apply extinction to decrease the adolescent's disruptive behavior?*
 - **Answer:** The mother could continue shopping for the items she needs from the first store even though her son is upset. She would remove the reinforcement, which in this case is leaving the store and getting the cereal. She could also verbally praise her son for appropriate behavior while in the store and reinforce him with a trip to the other store to get the cereal for engaging in appropriate behavior.

- 3. **Example:** Alex does not like to eat any foods that are green. Typically when staff members put a green food item on Alex's plate he becomes very disruptive and as a result, staff members remove the green food items.
 - *What is reinforcing the Alex's behavior in the example described above?*
 - **Answer:** Removing the non-preferred food items (escape)

 - *If the reinforcer is escape, how could staff apply extinction to decrease Alex's disruptive behavior?*
 - **Answer:** In this example Alex is being reinforced through the removal of the non-preferred food items (escape). In order to apply extinction to this example staff would have to present the green food items and no longer remove them (eliminating escape) when Alex becomes upset. Staff could also reinforce appropriate behavior for example when Alex leaves the green food item on his plate without becoming upset.