



Tips and Techniques

Positive Reinforcement

Scripture Verse: *"His master replied, 'Good job! You're a good and faithful servant! You proved that you could be trusted with a small amount. I will put you in charge of a large amount. Come and share your master's happiness.'" (Matthew 25:23, GWV)*

Grades: K-8

Background: Positive reinforcement is a very powerful technique teachers and parents can use to motivate students to learn and to behave. Everyone likes to have a pat on the back for accomplishment.

Purpose: Use positive reinforcement to improve or increase a child's performance of a certain activity, especially when reinforcement comes after each correct performance. Once the behavior is learned, rewards can be scheduled to develop persistence.

It is important to note that events which reinforce one person may not reinforce another and that events reinforced at one time may not be reinforcing at another. Therefore, it is important to select reinforcers very carefully and to vary the type of reinforcement.

There are many types of reinforcers; these may include physical expressions, such as, looking, smiling, winking, nodding, raising eyebrows, cheering, clapping hands, signaling O.K., thumbs up, taking a fast breath, etc. They may include closeness or nearness; for example, patting on the top of the head or hand, or standing alongside. Reinforcers could be activities, both social and individual; consider, performing a classroom duty, running errands, answering the classroom door, being the first in line. Reinforcers may include things, such as materials (new pencil, cards, marbles, tokens, beads, puzzles); food (popcorn, cookies, juices, fruit, lollipops, candy, marshmallows, cereal); playthings (beads, puzzles, kits, silly putty, slime, coloring books, chemistry set,); or awards (stars on a chart, certificates, checkmarks, stamps, points, etc.).

One of the most powerful reinforcers that all educators can use is social reinforcers in the form of words, both spoken and written.

Practice: We all have heard the saying, "Practice makes perfect." The development and employment of effective responses takes practice. One day I was passing a high school student who was studying at her desk. As I passed, I said, "Practice makes perfect." She at once looked up at me and said, "Perfect practice makes perfect." She had a good point; practicing social reinforcement enhances their effectiveness, especially if one desires to express a sincere feeling without being misunderstood. I encourage all educators and parents to practice developing proper and effective feedback. Accomplish this by talking in front of a mirror, talk into your cell phone, or practice with your spouse or another teacher.

Words Spoken: In observing hundreds of classroom teachers, most have a few words they speak, such as "Good job. Great. Nice." Varying the words spoken as social reinforcement helps avoid the old-hat effect, and makes them more effective. And, if it is difficult to remember the variety of words you can use, write them in your lesson book or place them

on a note card. Consider the following example: (use this list and check off the ones you use, then observe the response of your students as to which ones are more effective)

Yes	Brilliant	Cool	Wonderful Job
Good	Fine	Wonderful	Fantastic
Nice	Super	Of Course	Terrific
O.K.	Uh-huh	Perfect	Swell
Great	Positively	Exciting	Beautiful Job
Bravo!	Go ahead	Correct	Marvelous
Fascinating	Yeah	Excellent	Pleasant
Charming	All right	Absolutely Right	Splendid
Commendable	Nifty	Keep Going	Outstanding
Delightful	Exactly	How Beautiful	I am Pleased

Relate Performance to Action: Relate the child's performance to the action being reinforced. Be specific about the reason for the reinforcer. For example,

- "Perfect! You got all five answers correct."
- "You are really paying attention. You watched the board all the time I was presenting the example."
- "That's a good answer. You listened very closely to the question."
- "Jimmy is really working hard, He'll get the answer. You'll see."
- "Wow! You got it. I thought you would. That's great work."

The purpose in giving reasons for the social reinforcement is that it teaches the student to "reason out" the consequences of their own behavior. When reasons are provided, it helps connect why the consequence was given. The same principle works for negative reinforcement. Simply, tell the child what he did that earned a reward or discipline. For example,

- "I'm going to let you pass out the papers because you did such a good job in answering the questions concerning our story."
- "You'll have to miss our activity time because you did not take your seat when you were supposed to."

Relate Reasons to Consequences: Take the process one step further. After the child has been given several examples of reasons for reinforcement or punishment, begin to ask him to state the reasons. For example,

- "Why do you suppose I'm going to let you pass out the papers?"
- "I'm going to discipline you. Tell me what you did that was wrong."

Next, when the child has given the correct response, say the whole thing back to him.

- "Yes, you can pass out the papers because you did a good job in answering questions from our story."
- "That's right, you didn't take your seat when you were supposed to so you will miss your activity time."

Finally, when the child can tell you reasons for specific behavior, begin to work on general rules for behavior. For example,

- "You did a good job in answering questions, so you will be able to pass out the papers. When you can answer questions, good things happen."
- "You have to miss your activity period because you were not in your seat. If you are not in your seat, it's difficult to finish your work."