**Reinforcement and Punishment Explained**

In Applied Behavior Analysis, there are two types of reinforcement and punishment: positive and negative. It can be difficult to distinguish between the four of these. Therefore, the purpose of this blog is to explain the differences in order to help parents and professionals develop appropriate interventions to improve behavior.

**Reinforcement**

* Reinforcement is used to help increase the probability that a specific behavior will occur in the future by delivering a stimulus immediately after a response/behavior is exhibited.
* Another way to put it is that positive reinforcement is adding something that will motivate the child (or individual) to increase the likelihood they will engage in that behavior again.

**Positive Reinforcement:**

Positive reinforcement works by *presenting*a motivating/reinforcing consequence to the person after the desired behavior is exhibited, making the behavior more likely to happen in the future. (REWARD)

**The following are some examples of positive reinforcement:**

* A mother gives her son praise (positive consequence) for doing homework (behavior).
* The little boy receives $5.00 (positive consequence) for every A he earns on his report card (behavior).
* A father gives his daughter candy (positive consequence) for cleaning up toys (behavior).

**Negative Reinforcement:**

Negative reinforcement occurs when a certain stimulus (usually an aversive stimulus) is *removed* after a particular behavior is exhibited. The likelihood of the particular behavior occurring again in the future is increased because of removing/avoiding the negative consequence.

Negative reinforcement should not be thought of as a punishment procedure. With negative reinforcement, you are increasing a behavior, whereas with punishment, you are decreasing a behavior.

**The following are some examples of negative reinforcement:**

* Bob does the dishes (behavior) in order to avoid his mother nagging (negative stimulus).
* Natalie can get up from the dinner table (negative stimulus) when she eats 2 bites of her broccoli (behavior).

When thinking about reinforcement, always remember that the end result is to try to **increase the behavior**, whereas punishment procedures are used to decrease behavior. For positive reinforcement, think of it as adding something positive in order to increase a response. For negative reinforcement, think of it as taking something negative away in order to increase a response.

**Punishment**

* When people hear that punishment procedures are being used, they typically think of an aversive or harmful consequence. This is not always the case as you can see below.
* Punishment is a process by which a consequence immediately follows a behavior which decreases the future frequency of that behavior. Like reinforcement, a stimulus can be added (positive punishment) or removed (negative punishment).
* There are two types of punishment: positive and negative, and it can be difficult to tell the difference between the two. Below are some examples to help clear up the confusion.

**What is Positive Punishment:**

Positive punishment works by ***presenting* a negative consequence after an undesired behavior is exhibited**, making the behavior less likely to happen in the future. The following are some examples of positive punishment:

* A child picks his nose during class (behavior) and the teacher reprimands him (negative stimulus) in front of his classmates.
* A child grabs a toy from another child (behavior) and is sent to time out (negative stimulus)

**What is Negative Punishment:**

Negative punishment happens **when a certain desired stimulus is *removed* after a particular undesired behavior is exhibited**, resulting in the behavior happening less often in the future.

**The following are some examples of negative punishment:**

* For a child that really enjoys a specific class, such as gym or music classes at school, negative punishment can happen if they are removed from that class (desired stimulus) and sent to the principal’s office because they were acting out/misbehaving (behavior).
* If a child does not follow directions or acts inappropriately (behavior), he loses a token for good behavior (desired stimulus) that can later be cashed in for a prize.
* Siblings get in a fight (behavior) over who gets to go first in a game or who gets to play with a new toy, the parent takes the game/toy away (desired stimulus).

With punishment, always remember that the end result is to try to decrease the undesired behavior. Positive punishment involves adding a negative consequence after an undesired behavior is emitted to decrease future responses. Negative punishment includes taking away a certain desired item after the undesired behavior happens in order to decrease future responses.

Behavior