

# Rules of Reinforcement

by  
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1. Reinforcers should be reinforcing. What is reinforcing to one child may be aversive to another! Things that a child finds reinforcing at one time may not be later!
2. Reinforcement should be contingent. Reinforcers should only be available when a target behavior occurs so as not to diminish it's power. (Non-contingent reinforcement can be offered in attempts to pair the instructor or an undesired activity with reinforcement.)
3. A variety of reinforcers should be used. This is to insure the reinforcer will keep its value as well as providing a way to give differential reinforcement.
4. Always pair social reinforcers with primary reinforcers.
5. Continuously develop and identify new reinforcers. Look at the child's self-stimulatory behaviors to help you determine what he might enjoy.
6. Use age appropriate reinforcers. This will increase peer acceptance and increase the likelihood that the child will encounter these things in the natural environment.
7. Unpredictability and novelty greatly enhance reinforcement. Surprises are usually very enjoyable and highly motivating. A grab bag or surprise box may be helpful.
8. In the beginning, reinforcement should occur immediately. You must be sure the child associates his behavior with the reinforcement. Reinforcement is most effective when it occurs within ½ second following the behavior.
9. A variable reinforcement schedule should be established and followed consistently.
10. Reinforcement should be faded over time as a child learns the skill. Easy tasks should have a relatively "thin" schedule of reinforcement.
11. Evaluate the timing of reinforcement- Don't break the momentum of working to reinforce and work toward building a cluster of responses before giving a tangible reward.
12. Over time, change to reinforcers that are more natural and practical - social praise, "thumbs up".
13. Do not use rewards as bribery. Do not get the child in a habit of hearing in advance about the reinforcer he will receive. Do not remind the child of the reinforcer he would be getting if disruptive behavior were not occurring. Do not offer additional reinforcers when behavior escalates in attempts to calm him down.
14. Use differential reinforcement. Provide the best rewards for the best behaviors or "hardest" work while saving the "OK" reinforcers for "OK" work or de-escalation of behaviors.

