

The application of behavioral principles to feeding

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Changing behavior is a messy issue!

- Behavior is a complex area of study
- Human behavior change is difficult and time consuming
- There are no guarantees and no absolutes
- General application is discouraged
- Look at each child on individual basis

- Observe and note behaviors first and make decisions second
- Data collection is a way to sit back and watch!



Changing feeding (or any) behavior is a messy issue

- Consistency is key: everyone has to be doing the same thing all of the time.

- Remember....The most powerful reinforcement for human behavior is the intermittent type. It is important not to provide any intermittent reinforcement...accidental or otherwise

- And....defining the behavior is essential



An important point!

- Practically, we need to think about behavior in terms of the function of the behavior AND
- The contingencies (big word for *things*) that maintain the behavior in the child's environment.

- Adults are responsible for maintaining many of the behaviors that we see in children.



Thinking about maintaining behaviors

In order to change your child's behavior you must accept that...

- Behavior is not something that is *in* the child that can be fixed or repaired.
- Behavior is not a part of the child comparable to a heart, lung, or a brain
- Behavior is, in fact, the interaction that is generated between you and the child.



Important behavioral principles



- And how they relate to feeding...



Reinforcement

- **Positive reinforcement:** a stimulus is presented (token, praise, tasty bite of something yummy) after a response (eating) and as a result the future frequency of the behavior (eating) increases
- **Negative reinforcement:** a stimulus is removed (food) after a response (tantrum) and as a result the future frequency of the behavior (tantrum) increases (*often thought of as the removal of an aversive condition*)



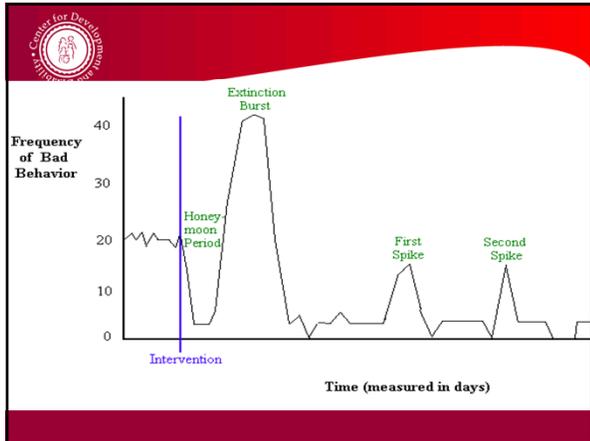
History of reinforcement

- Different people arrive at a given situation with different histories of reinforcement
- These are behaviors that have produced reinforcers or have helped to escape/avoid in the past
- Some responses have been strengthened
- Some have been weakened



Extinction

- Extinction is the withdrawal of reinforcement for previously reinforced behavior. So... if you have previously reinforced (in your child) the avoidance of certain foods and decide to change that...
- You will see an extinction burst if you change the consequence for that previously reinforced avoidance behavior
- The new response will increase before gradually decreasing.



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Disadvantages of extinction & punishment

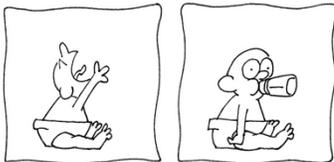
- Emotional behavior
- Aggressive behavior
- Other unwanted responses
- Self-perpetuating
- Escape and avoidance
- Lack of acceptance

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Positive reinforcement



Negative reinforcement





Determining if there is a problem

- Child is not gaining weight
- Child is dependent on tubes but can feed by mouth
- Problems with textures
- Food refusal
- Mealtimes are disrupted by challenging behaviors
- Chewing or swallowing is a problem



Consider before starting...

- Medical problems such as
 - Gastroesophageal Reflux
 - Constipation
 - Diarrhea
 - Food allergies
 - Oral motor delays
 - Dysphagia



Types of eating problems

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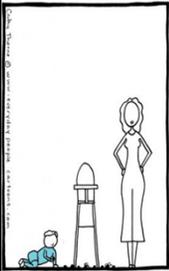
"I can't try this... I might like it."

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- Food selectivity (e.g., type, color, brand)
- Chewing skill deficit
- Refusal of liquids (adipsia)
- Insistence on eating with certain utensils
- Food refusal
- Refusal to self-feed
- Refusal to eat in public places



It is important to start right away



ACTUALLY THE CRUSHERS ARE INTENTIONALLY LEFT ON THE FLOOR TO DEVELOP FINE MOTOR SKILLS.

- To maintain nutritional needs
- Improve family life
- For improved social interaction at meal times
- To improve other related skills
- To decrease unwanted behaviors



Identifying the problem

- Collect information on the food that the child eats over several days
- How closely does it match the food offered in the family
- How much is the child eating?
- What is the eating schedule?
- Drinks?
- Where does the child eat?
- How is food presented? Utensils? Dishes?
- How long is the meal?



Functional Behavior Assessment of feeding

- The objective of functional assessment is not just to define and eliminate challenging behaviors but to understand the function of those behaviors in order to promote effective alternatives and to create environments and patterns of support that make challenging behaviors
 - irrelevant
 - inefficient
 - ineffective



Making Behaviors Irrelevant

- Identify occasions of environments that set the occasion for the behavior and organize that environment to reduce the likelihood that these conditions will happen again.
- This typically involves changes—altering the setting, enriching the environment, attention or tangibles, improving the activities, increasing predictability and choice options for the individual



Making Behaviors Inefficient

- The efficiency of a behavior refers to the effects of:
 - the physical effort required for a person to perform the behavior
 - the number of times a person must engage in the behavior before they are reinforced
 - the time delay between the first behavior and reinforcement (Latency)



Making Behaviors Inefficient

- Efforts should be made to make the behavior inefficient, while simultaneously identifying an alternative, socially appropriate, and *more* efficient response that enables the student to achieve the same reward.



Making Behaviors Ineffective

- Challenging behaviors will continue to occur as long as those behaviors are effective in getting the desired response, that is, they continue to be reinforced.
- Efforts need to be made to make these behaviors ineffective in obtaining the reinforcer
- Extinction involves systematically withholding or preventing access to a reinforcing outcome that previously was delivered



Teaching techniques

- Pair preferred and new foods
- Reintroduce previously eaten foods
- Start with a single bite
 - On a separate plate
 - With preferred food on the plate
- Modeling



Reinforcement for eating?

- Using preferred foods as rewards
- Using other tangibles as rewards
- Taste sessions (outside meal times)
- Escape after eating
- Token programs



Specific feeding interventions

- Escape prevention: expulsion, re-presentation
- Texture fading: pureed, junior, ground, chopped, regular
- Prompting for self feeding
- Chaining
- Modifying rate of eating



Mealtime behavior problems

- Pairing for children who have intensive dislike of mealtimes
- Only eating from specific dishes/utensils
 - Use fading
- Attention
 - Time out



Taking control

- Tell the child what you want him to do, not what you don't want him to do
- Be specific, avoid "good boy", "good girl"
- Model the behavior..eat peas too!
- Reward with praise, tokens, tasty bites
- Build on small behaviors first
- Withdraw attention for the inappropriate behavior
- Reward appropriate behavior
- Provide a consequence, avoid using threats



Final words

- Keep data while you work through the feeding behaviors
- Remember it is messy, slow and difficult
- Remember that reinforcement is not bribery
- Don't discontinue a behavior change program too soon
- Use visuals: clocks, pictures, first...then etc.
- Vary reinforcement often, making sure that what you are using is really a reinforcer
 - (remember... a reinforcer causes an increase in the future occurrence of the behavior)



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