

*Teaching Self-help: Back to Basics of Shaping, Chaining & Prompt Fading*

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*First of all.....*

- It's ALL self-help skills. While we'll talk a lot about "activities of daily living" in this talk, is learning to speak not a self-help skill?
- What would be the point of any Applied Behavior Analytic, or in fact any teaching, program, if it were not to increase autonomy? Building skills builds choices and thereby increases freedom!

*Therefore....*

- Consider all skills you are planning to teach carefully. Follow the five year rule.
- What will (s)he need to be able to do in five years?
- If a program isn't teaching a skill that will truly be needed, why are we working on it?

*A little rule of thumb*

- If you have a massive "maintenance book," that might mean difficulties for your teaching programs.
- If it isn't being practiced and used, why did you spend so much time on teaching it?

*Let's talk specific strategies*

- We'll touch on shaping, chaining and prompt-fading.
- Then we'll make a foray into some toileting as a case study and a reminder regarding how we have to individualize programs.

*The Behavior Goal*

- Remember the "Dead Person's Test."
- What should the person do?
- How much of it should they do?
- Under what circumstances should they do it?

### *Shaping*

- The creation of new behavior by reinforcing approximations to a desired behavior

### *To Shape a Behavior, Part One*

- Find the best approximation to the desired (“target”) behavior
- Reinforce that approximation
- When behavior is reliable, place the approximation on extinction (i.e., DO NOT REINFORCE IT)

### *To Shape a Behavior, Part Two*

- An extinction burst will set in, and this will increase behavioral variability
- Seek a variation that is closer to the desired or target behavior
- Reinforce that closer approximation
- Go back to step #2, reinforce the new, better approximation
- Continue until the behavior is perfect

### *To Shape a Behavior, Final Considerations*

- Remember the definition of a reinforcer!
- Go to an intermittent reinforcement schedule on the perfect behavior
- Work towards generalization and maintenance

### *Chaining*

- Combining several smaller behaviors to make one long, complex behavior

### *Forward Chaining*

- This can be done via forward chaining (teach first step first, second step second and so on until one completely teaches the behavior), or

### *Backward Chaining*

- This can be done via backward chaining (prompt the student through the full behavior, working on the last step in the chain first, and, when this is mastered, working on teaching the last step AND the next to last step, etc., until one completely teaches the behavior)

### *To chain a behavior*

- Create a task analysis of the behavior to be taught
- A task analysis is a written description of all the steps a person must perform in order to complete a behavior
- HINT FOR WRITING TASK ANALYSES: perform the behavior yourself, talking out loud into a tape recorder, describing each step as you perform it

### *A pre-written task analysis is JUST A STARTING POINT!*

- Task analyses must be constantly re-written based upon student progress
- If a student is having difficulty with a given step, break the step down further
- A task analysis that begins as seven steps may end up being 107 steps.

### *Prompting*

- The definition changes from program to program, but basically we're talking about adding in an extra antecedent stimulus to bring about a behavior.

### *Types of prompts*

- They work across the sensory modalities
- There are general classes of prompt.
  - Verbal (e.g., saying something else)
  - Visual (adding an extra sight cue)
  - Physical (moving the person)

### *Why do it?*

- It can help to get behavior to occur

### *Why not do it?*

- Prompt dependency can be created with careless prompting.

### *Styles*

- Most to least prompting (full and fade down as you can)
- Least to most prompting (start with little and build up as needed)

### *And the data says.....*

- You can use either, but.....
- Most to least prompting is often most effective for teaching and reducing prompt dependency and is easier for staff to implement effectively.
- Bobby bias: when possible, start with most to least and fade.

### *Whatever you do, the idea is to fade eventually*

- Prompts are not meant to be life-long
- You should be looking to fade as soon as possible.

### *Types of fading*

- Depend on the modality you are using, just think logically.
- For verbal cues, you can say less and less of the word, or softer and softer or after a longer and longer delay, etc.
- For physical prompts, you can touch lighter and lighter, or further and further up arm, etc.
- For visual, provide less and less of the cue (e.g., a smaller sign or gesture)

### *Prompts are for fading*

- When you introduce a prompt, you should simultaneously introduce a plan for fading that prompt.

*The balancing act*

- Failure to prompt adequately = not teaching effectively.
- Excessive prompting = taking away the person's chance to learn independence

*Toileting is like any other behavior*

- We make it more complex than it needs to be
- It is a basic biological function that we teach the student to perform in a particular way
- Appropriate behavior is reinforced, and then comes under appropriate stimulus control

*As with all things.....*

- A functional analysis must be conducted so that we understand the nature of any behavioral issues and design plans appropriately.
- In other words, students may not be going in the toilet for a variety of reasons (insufficient muscle control, attention-seeking behavior, rituals or compulsions, etc.)

*Which plan?*

- Plans must be designed in keeping with the function of the behavior
- Anyone who says differently is selling something

*Remember the dead person's test!!!*

- Anything a dead person can do is not a behavior and therefore should not be the object of a treatment plan!

*Um, right.*

- I mean that dead people don't have accidents.
- A treatment plan based on not having accidents therefore fails the dead person test.
- If you want to teach toileting, your object is to teach urination/defecation in the toilet.
- You must not void where prohibited

*OK, down to basics*

- Does the student urinate or defecate in the toilet?
- Have they ever done so? If so, when and how consistently?

*Plan in keeping with function*

- Sometimes we hang around the toilet all day to practice going as often as possible in order to build up stimulus control and eventually to fade to a schedule and develop bladder strength.
- Sometimes it will mean being in the toilet until we break an obsession
- Sometimes we're teaching initiations outside and on a schedule, etc.

*If the issue is bladder strength, part 1*

- You'll spend your whole day in the bathroom (or as close as possible).
- Move in program books, toys, whatever you need for the day
- Have the student drink as much as possible.
- Have the student wear undergarments that will let you see the split second urination has begun (not ended or is deep in process)!!!!

*If the issue is bladder strength, part 2*

- As soon as you see urination begin, move the student towards the toilet. Use verbal/physical/gestural prompts as needed to be quick!
- Have a SUPER SPECIAL reinforcer for successful toileting, a reinforcer that is given only for successful elimination in the toilet.

*Data, data, data*

- Keep records of the times the student has urinated.
- This will allow you to get a good idea when it's time to start schedule training outside the toilet, or when to move the student towards the toilet while you're still in there.

*What else you're looking for*

- Any characteristic signs that may signal urination is about to begin so that you can begin to anticipate and move the student towards the toilet even before urination begins
- When the student begins to independently move towards the toilet, you can begin transitioning out of the bathroom area.

*Now its time for a schedule*

- You'll take the child to the bathroom on a schedule.
- Slightly under-estimate based on what you collected during the intensive in the toilet period. Remember, you want lots of success.

*GET RID OF DIAPERS/PULL UPS!*

- These are a bad mixed message
- "We don't expect you to have accidents, but just in case you do....."
- Better to have a bit more laundry and consistent expectations.

*As you schedule, initiations training*

- Every time you take the student to the toilet on the schedule, teach some form of communication in order to make initiations on the part of the student possible.
- This can be verbal, this can be a sign, this can be a PEC, a photograph, etc.
- Prompt the response each time it is time to move to the bathroom

*A suggestion*

- Use a timer or something artificial to mark the schedule so as to avoid dependence on another person.
- We'll have the student reset the timer him/herself eventually as we work towards independence and away from their need to be prompted externally.

*Gradually lengthen the interval*

- As the student is becoming more and more successful, gradually lengthen the interval by a few minutes each time.
- Generally, as the schedule lengthens sufficiently and as initiation training begins, the student will gradually wean him/herself off the schedule and begin to go as needed.

*What if it isn't a matter of bladder strength?*

- Sometimes it's a ritual that has been created.
- Sometimes it's an attention-seeking behavior.
- Sometimes it's a specific phobia or other idiosyncratic issue (e.g., having trouble with the flushing noise).

*We plan accordingly, while trying to minimize distress*

- When dealing with a ritual, you will try to break the ritual. Sometimes this means waiting the student out within the bathroom and eliminating other possibilities (e.g., getting rid of the diapers).
- Other times a specific ritual must be addressed (e.g., a student who can only go at home or only in the first stall). Try to teach any coping skills possible.

*If it's attention seeking*

- We eliminate any attention for accidents.
- Make sure to not have reinforcing changing rituals
- Do not make a big deal out of accidents and try to make changing as matter-of-fact as possible, having the student do as much for him/herself as possible.

*If it is a phobia, Two main programs*

- Systematic desensitization (e.g., getting student used to sitting, while keeping them nice and relaxed)
- Flooding (e.g., student afraid of toilet backing up, see case study below)

*Case Study: Flooding a fear of flooding*

- An otherwise very high-functioning student, formerly diagnosed with autism, began to refuse to use the bathroom to defecate.

*The behavior*

- He would defecate in his pants and hide it or throw it in the garbage, but never use the toilet to defecate.
- This was going on at home for some months before they told the school.
- Apparently, the toilet had flooded at one time and now he was afraid to ever use it to defecate.

*Treatment*

- The student's mother broke this news to me after 3 days of his not going at home, so the timing was perfect.
- I moved into the bathroom with the student and encouraged him to go, assuring him that it would not flood (and praying it wouldn't).

*Success, part one*

- The student eliminated in the toilet, then tried to spear me to get out of the toilet without flushing, all the while yelling “IT’S GONNA FLOOD!!!”

*Success, part two*

- The toilet didn’t flood (mercifully).
- We flushed, and several other toilets around the school many times, single-handedly creating a drought situation within New York City
- Desensitization was achieved and later generalized to home.

*Bowel training*

- Bowel training is like urinary training, but a bit tougher in that there are not as many opportunities to practice.
- The name of the game here is preparation. Take data on roughly how frequently the student goes given a particular eating regimen and then plan to be in the toilet around the time (s)he will usually go.

*Beware the vicious cycle!*

- Students often hold it in, which then makes the bowel movement painful.
- They then hold it in, for fear of the pain. That makes the bowel movement painful.
- So they hold it in.....
- **BOTTOM LINE: TRY TO GET THE STUDENT GOING FREQUENTLY!**

*And then....*

- Follow the same procedures as for urinary training.

*Don’t forget the details!*

- Wiping
- Getting pants up and down
- Fastening
- Washing hands
- and stuff

