

Tracking Teachers' Behavior to Concurrently Decrease Punishment Use with and Problem Behavior in a Child with Autism while Decreasing the Child's Frequency of Negative Statements

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Intervening with children's problem behavior can be tricky business. Adding punishment procedures into a child's intervention plan can not only add to the trickiness but also switch the attention of on-line staff members away from what should be the goal of any intervention for misbehavior-preventing the misbehavior and teaching functionally equivalent adaptive skills. The Chart we present here documents one intervention we have tried to help direct care staff members focus on preventing misbehavior rather than punishing it.

Patrick is a 10-year-old boy with moderate autism who has received fluency-based instruction since May 2003. He attends school with his typically developing peers, but he also receives 4 to 5 hours of one-on-one teaching daily under the direction of the first three authors. The fourth and fifth authors implement his one-on-one teaching program, which consists of Precision Teaching and Direct Instruction curricula for reading skills, language skills, and math.

When Patrick began a Precision Teaching based intervention in May 2003, he often displayed high frequencies of very problematic misbehavior. Patrick's aggressive and destructive behavior served the functions of gaining attention and escaping tasks. For example, to escape tasks or difficult situations, Patrick threw objects such as toys and furniture, screamed, used profanity, yelled, kicked, punched, ran away, fell to the ground, or grabbed people.

After completing a functional assessment, we developed a comprehensive behavior support plan that included a behavior reduction procedure using negative punishment.¹ If Patrick swore, broke

an object, or hit one of his therapists, siblings, or parents, he lost access to the television, computer, and his X-box video game for the rest of that day. Because of our concern with using a punishment-based procedure, we tracked the number of times his therapists delivered this consequence per week starting in September 2003. These data are shown on the left side of the Monthly per Month Standard Celeration Chart (SCC) we present here. At first, the data showed quite a bit of bounce, with Patrick losing his electronics privileges one to three times per month.

In March 2004, we reexamined which problem behaviors occasioned the punishment procedure. It was at this time that we added behaviors such as jumping out of his chair or leaving the table unannounced as causes for the "no TV, no video, and no X-box" consequence. On the left side of the SCC, we noted these behaviors as outbursts. Once these behaviors were added, the number of times Patrick received the consequence began to increase precipitously.

To help address this alarming increase in how often Patrick lost his electronic privileges, in May 2004 we addressed the training procedures in place for Patrick's therapists by having them begin to track the number of times they caught Patrick in an agitated state before he displayed any of the very problematic behavior that occasioned losing his TV, computer, and video games for the day. When Patrick was agitated, we trained his therapists to offer things or help Patrick choose things that might decrease his frustration and help him avoid displaying severe misbehavior. Examples of frustration reducers for Patrick included: (a) Patrick asking to stop the task, (b) Patrick asking for help with the task from his therapist, (c) Patrick asking for the task to be made easier, or (d) Patrick asking to take a break. Once his therapists started charting their own behavior, the number of times Patrick lost his TV, computer, and video game privileges decreased dramatically.

Prior to developing and implementing Patrick's behavior intervention program, we also began counting the number of negative statements Patrick made while he worked with his therapists. We show these data on the right side of the Monthly per Month SCC. Initially, Patrick expressed negative statements at a frequency of 600 per month. We used changes in these data as

¹ We would like to stress that the punishment procedure we describe here comprised only one part of the behavior support plan we developed for Patrick.

one indication of Patrick's unhappiness with the intervention program, as we changed varying aspects of the program throughout the summer and fall of 2003 to continue to reduce the number of negative statements he made. In December 2004, we implemented an intervention to try to decrease Patrick's frequency of saying negative statements. This intervention involved, we *thought*, reinforcing longer and longer intervals that passed without Patrick making a negative statement. When we implemented this procedure (which we labeled as "R⁺ increased time without negative statements"), Patrick's monthly frequency of negative statements immediately increased and continued to accelerate even after we stopped the procedure. His frequency of negative statements did not decrease until we implemented a new chart in his program—Free-Say Positive Things. Here, Patrick practiced saying positive things about himself, his skills, and his therapists each day for a maximum of 10 minutes. This intervention appears to have dramatically decreased his frequency of negative statements.

Patrick has now gone for an entire year without losing his television, computer, and video game privileges. His frequency of making negative statements about himself and the people who work with him has decreased from 600 per month initially to a very tolerable 3 per month. His skills continue to progress nicely, and both he and his therapists seem much happier.

