MONTHLY TIP - NOVEMBER 2017

SWWC

BEHAVIOR SERVICES

Competing with Uncontrolled Reinforcement

Students will respond in the manner that will provide them with the "most" reinforcement. This can often cause problems because sometimes we cannot possibly control all the sources of reinforcement a student may get from responding with inappropriate or challenging behavior (e.g. attention from peers instead of adults, stealing things the student wants, leaving the room to escape expectations and instructions, etc.). This phenomenon is called the Matching Law; individuals will distribute their responding to the choice that will produce the highest level of reinforcement over other available choices (Reed & Kaplan, 2011). There are at least four dimensions of reinforcement that will affect how the student might respond.

- **Rate of reinforcement:** getting more attention from school staff when leaving the classroom and walking the halls versus staying in class and completing assigned work.
- **Quality of reinforcement:** getting a laugh from a peer when telling a tall-tale about what happened over the weekend versus telling a true story about their weekend.
- **Delay of reinforcement:** stating out loud in class a question versus raising their hand and waiting for the teacher to call on them.
- **Effort needed to obtain reinforcement:** raising hand to ask questions versus looking up answers to questions in available classroom resources.

To better compete with the reinforcement a student might be getting for inappropriate or challenging behavior, try to increase a couple different dimensions of the reinforcement given for the appropriate, replacement behavior.

A student loves attention from staff and peers. The student will often leave the room and walk the halls to chat with other students and teachers during independent worktime. The teacher effectively competes with the reinforcement obtained in the hallway by decreasing the delay and increasing the rate and quality of reinforcement in the classroom.

Give one example of how to decrease the delay and increase the rate and quality of reinforcement in the classroom.

Example Answer: During independent worktime the teacher walks around the classroom and provides praise and acknowledgement of the student's work (**rate**) and breaks up independent worktime, 5 minutes work alone, 5 minutes check answers with a partner, (**delay**). Additionally, the teacher has moved the student to the front of the room, farthest seat away from the door (**effort**).

*Reed, D.D. & Kaplan, B.A. (2011). The matching law: A tutorial for practitioners. Behavior Analysis in Practice, 4, 15-24.

For more information:

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Upcoming Events

Behavior Conference
Monday, April 9, 2018
Marshall, MN
or
Tuesday, April 10, 2018
Brookings, SD
~Registration Coming Soon~

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