

Decreasing a Behavior with Extinction

Extinction: If in a given situation, an individual emits a previously reinforced response and that response is not followed by a reinforcing consequence, then that person is less likely to do the same thing in the future.

Effectively Extinguishing a Behavior:

- Control reinforcers for the behavior that is to be decreased. Be sure that others are not interfering with your extinction plan by reinforcing “behind your back.” It is also important that you are sure that the reinforcers you are withholding are actually the ones maintaining that behavior.

Effectively Extinguishing a Behavior:

- Extinction is most effective when it is combined with reinforcement of an alternative behavior.
- Changing the setting in which the extinction is carried out can minimize the possibility that others will reinforce the behavior you are trying to decrease. For example, it may be unwise to try to extinguish a child’s temper tantrums in a department store. Start at home.

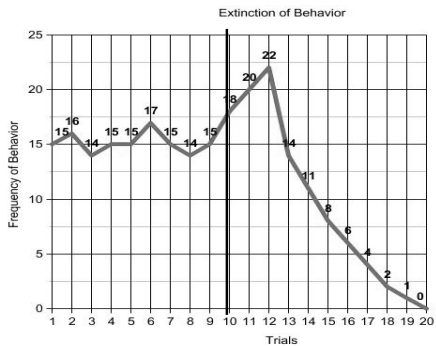
Effectively Extinguishing a Behavior:

- Use instructions and rules. Let the child know what behavior you are going to ignore and why.
- Consider the reinforcement schedule that was maintaining the behavior before beginning extinction. It is easier to extinguish a behavior after continuous reinforcement rather than intermittent reinforcement. When a behavior has always been reinforced and then is never reinforced, the behavior extinguishes fairly quickly. Behavior that extinguishes slowly is said to be *resistant to extinction*.

Effectively Extinguishing a Behavior:

- Behavior being extinguished may get worse before it gets better. This is called an *extinction burst*.
- Most of us have learned that if something is no longer paying off, a slight increase in the behavior may be sufficient to again bring the payoff.

Effectively Extinguishing a Behavior:



Effectively Extinguishing a Behavior:

- ◆ Extinction may produce aggression that interferes with the program.
- ◆ It is very important to not give up on an extinction program at this point.
- ◆ If an extinction program produces mild aggression, and then the plan is abandoned, not only will the undesirable behavior be placed on an intermittent reinforcement schedule making it more resistant to extinction in the future, but the aggression will also be reinforced.

Effectively Extinguishing a Behavior:

Sometimes an extinguished behavior may reappear after some time. This is called *spontaneous recovery*.

Summary: Guidelines for Effective Application of Extinction:

- ◆ Choose one specific behavior to be decreased.
- ◆ Remember the possibility that the behavior may get worse before it gets better and of the possibility of aggression occurring.
- ◆ Be sure you can adequately control the setting in which the behavior occurs and the reinforcers.

Summary: Guidelines for Effective

Application of Extinction:

- ◆ Specifically try to identify what reinforcer is maintaining the behavior.
- ◆ Identify some desirable alternative behavior.
- ◆ Identify an effective reinforcer for the desired alternative behavior.
- ◆ Be sure all relevant people know the details of the extinction plan so that they do not inadvertently undermine your efforts.
- ◆ Tell the learner the plan before starting and the rules for reinforcing the alternative behavior.

Summary: Guidelines for Effective

Application of Extinction:

- ◆ Be completely resistant after implementing the plan.
- ◆ Wean the student from the plan.
- ◆ Be prepared for the possibility of spontaneous recovery.
- ◆ If the plan fails, check if you withheld the proper reinforcer, if the undesired behavior was receiving intermittent reinforcement from another source, or if the desired alternative behavior has not been strengthened appropriately.
