

Eliminating Inappropriate Behaviors Through Punishment

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Punisher

- An event that, when presented immediately following a behavior, causes the behavior to decrease in frequency.

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Types of Punishers

- Physical punishment - all punishers that activate pain receptors or other sense receptors that evoke feelings of discomfort. They are *unconditioned punishers*; they are punishing without any prior learning.
- Examples: spanking, squirting with water, shock

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Types of Punishers

- **Reprimands** - strong negative verbal stimuli accompanied by a fixed stare. They are *conditioned punishers* because to gain effectiveness, they have probably been paired with physical punishment or other unconditioned punishers.

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Types of Punishers

- **Timeout** – transferring an individual from a more reinforcing to a less reinforcing situation following a particular behavior.
- **Exclusionary timeout** – removing the individual from the situation in which reinforcement is occurring; being detained in a timeout chair or timeout room
- **Nonexclusionary timeout** – introducing into the situation a stimulus associated with less reinforcement; e.g. staying in the classroom but not being allowed to participate in an activity.

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Types of Punishers

- **Response cost** – removal of a specified amount of reinforcer following a particular behavior.
- **Examples:** fines, tickets, loss of tokens

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Factors Influencing The Effectiveness of Punishment

- Maximize the conditions for a desirable alternative response by: specifying a desirable alternative;
- Identifying and highlighting S^Ds which control the desirable behavior (e.g. rules); present those S^Ds to increase the likelihood of those behaviors.

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Factors Influencing The Effectiveness of Punishment

- Minimize the cause of the response to be punished by first trying to identify the current stimulus control of the undesirable behavior and identifying reinforcers for the undesirable behavior.

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Factors Influencing The Effectiveness of Punishment

- Select a punisher.
- Verbal reprimands alone are rarely effective and in fact often function as positive reinforcers.
- The punisher should be one that is fairly intense and which can be presented immediately.

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Factors Influencing The Effectiveness of Punishment

- It is also important that the punisher in no way can be paired with positive reinforcement.
- This is difficult since the adult administering the punishment has often had many loving and enjoyable interactions with the child.
- Therefore, even this punishing interaction is paired with the presence and attention of the adult.

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Factors Influencing The Effectiveness of Punishment

- Add antecedents for punishment.
- Like an S^D indicates when a behavior will be reinforced, there are also discriminative stimuli that indicate when a behavior will be punished (S^{Dp}).
- Rules serve as good S^{Dp}'s.

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Factors Influencing The Effectiveness of Punishment

- Emphasize to the learner the conditions in which punishment will be administered by stating a rule

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Factors Influencing The Effectiveness of Punishment

- Presenting the punisher: The punisher must be presented immediately. If it is delayed, a more desirable behavior may occur in the interim which will then be punished. Punishment must also occur after every instance of the behavior.
- Increase the effectiveness by using rules whenever possible.

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When to use punishment:

- Cases it has found to be effective are mostly those incidents of severe self-injurious behaviors in severely disabled individuals.
- Once the self-injurious behavior is suppressed, you must then use reinforcement to maintain more desirable behavior.

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Potentially harmful effects of punishment include:

- Punishment tends to elicit aggressive behavior.
- Punishment can produce undesirable emotional side effects such as crying and fearfulness.
- Punishment may cause the situation and the people associated with the aversive stimulus to become conditioned punishers.

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Potentially harmful effects of punishment include:

- Punishment only suppresses an undesirable behavior; it alone does not establish any new behavior.
- Children model the punishing behavior or adults and learn to apply aversive stimuli to others.
- Because it can produce a quick suppression of the behavior, the individual may use it at the neglect of any use of positive reinforcement.

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Potentially harmful effects of punishment include:

- A particular cautionary note: criticism or ridicule for inadequate behavior.
- The inadequate behavior may have been an approximation of a desirable behavior. Criticism may cause the individual to suppress the behavior entirely, thus interfering with shaping.

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Summary: Effective Application of Punishment

1. Select a specific behavior to punish.
2. Maximize the conditions for a desirable response by: selecting a specific desirable competing behavior; providing strong prompts (S^Ds) to increase the likelihood of the desirable behavior; and reinforce the desirable behavior with a powerful reinforcer on an appropriate schedule.

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**Summary: Effective
Application of Punishment**

3. Minimize the causes of the behavior to be punished by: identifying and/or eliminating all of the S^Ds for the undesired behavior and eliminating any possible reinforcement for the undesirable behavior.
4. Select an effective punisher which: can be administered immediately; is not paired with any positive reinforcement; and which can be delivered after every instance of the behavior.

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**Summary: Effective
Application of Punishment**

5. Apply the punisher by: telling the individual about the plan first; presenting the punisher immediately after every instance of the behavior; administering the punisher in a calm and matter-of-fact manner; and taking care not to pair punishment of the behavior with reinforcement for that behavior.
6. Take careful data on the effects of the program.

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