

Extinction

What is Extinction?

- *Extinction* is a procedure in which reinforcement is no longer provided for a previously reinforced behavior
- In order for extinction to be effective and to discontinue the problematic behavior, you must first identify what is maintaining the behavior
- Typically, a BCBA will conduct a functional assessment to determine the function of a problematic behavior
- Functional assessments include interviews with caregivers and determining what happens before and after the problematic behaviors
- Seeking attention or an item, attempting to or escaping from demands, and sensory reinforcement typically maintain problematic behaviors
- Once we know what is maintaining the behavior, we are able to break this relationship using extinction

When do we use Extinction?

- We use extinction once we have determined what may be maintaining the behavior
- For example:
 - Attention maintained: if the child continues to engage in a problematic behavior and purposefully seeks your eye contact or reaction
 - Maintained by access to tangibles: if the child engages in the problematic behavior when an item is denied or removed (ex: when the iPad is removed, the child screams)
 - Escape from demands: If the child engages in the problematic behavior following a demand (ex: throw away your trash or clean up your room)
 - Automatic reinforcement or sensory reinforcement: if the child engages in the behavior in different environments even when others are not around or during play

What is an Extinction Burst?

- When extinction is implemented often times the behavior gets worse before it gets better
- This is because the child may be trying new behaviors in attempts to gain access to reinforcement that was previously provided (ex: instead of just screaming to escape the demand, the child may now scream and throw him or herself on the floor too)
- This doesn't mean that extinction is not working and extinction should continue to be utilized
- This is normal and with consistency will gradually decrease until the behavior is extinguished

Tips

- When using extinction for attention-maintained behaviors, avoid all eye contact, physical contact, and verbal contact
- When using extinction for problematic behaviors maintained by access to tangibles, do not provide access to the item until the behavior has discontinued and the child has asked appropriately or has earned this item
- When using extinction for escape-maintained behaviors, do not allow the child to escape the demand
- This is when prompting can be effective (see "Effective Use of Prompting" handout)
- When using extinction for sensory or automatically maintained behaviors, this may be a little more tricky
- If the child engages in repeated words or phrases, a list of questions can be created to replace the behavior by redirecting the child to answer the appropriate question (ex: appropriate social questions like "What is your name?" or "How old are you?")
- If the child engages in a repetitive body movement, this movement can be blocked or redirected to something else (ex: playing with a toy)