

Teacher's Guide

Supporting the wellbeing of primary school children

Reinforcers and rewards



Providing a student reinforcement in response to positive behaviours can increase the chances of the same desirable behaviour and reduce disruptive behaviour. Students who find it difficult to complete tasks or exhibit challenging behaviours may respond to targeted reinforcers and rewards schemes focused on addressing their behaviours.

Younger children tend to prefer reinforcers and rewards focused on their ability, where older children have a preference for reinforcers and rewards for effort.

Reinforcement must be contingent on behaviour. Brainstorm with the students rewards that motivate them. If a student does not display the desired behaviours, withholding reinforcement will teach the student that the displayed behaviour is not required and that only the desired behaviour will be rewarded. Explain to the student why they are not receiving a reinforcer, recognise that they may be disappointed but they will have the opportunity to try again tomorrow.

Improvement should be reinforced to let the student know their effort is being recognised.

Reinforcement must be consistently delivered, a reward chart can be used to track and reward good behaviour. The student should have their goals clearly outlined on the reward chart and the final reward should be set in advance. Stickers or stamps can be used to track progress, and if a student earns a certain amount of stickers, they receive a reward.

To gain the best impact, reinforcers should be delivered immediately.

Direct rewards

Provide reinforcement related to the behaviour.

For example, interacting appropriately with peers in group activities will lead to more opportunities to be involved in such activities.

Social rewards

Provide sincere and clear praise for appropriate behaviour, verbally, in writing or even using positive body language. Social reinforcement can be paired with all other forms of reinforcement.

General praise is not effective unless it is contingent on a behaviour or targeted on a task.

Activity-based rewards

Participation in a preferred activity as a reward for appropriate behaviour.

Allowing a student to choose a classmate with whom to participate in the activity creates additional social reinforcement.

Tangible rewards

Rewards such as age appropriate small toys, stickers or awards.

Awards can be in the form of certificates, displaying work and letters home to parents commending the student's progress.

Tokens

Award points or tokens for appropriate behaviour, which can later be exchanged for something of value, an activity or something tangible.

If the behaviour persists despite trying a number of interventions, discuss the student's situation with a supervisor or member of the learning and wellbeing support staff at your school.

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-teachers-guide>