

Problems with Peers





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- Teasing and Uncontrolled Reinforcers
- Peers as Competition for Attention
- Attention Loss
- Attention Party
- Peer Presence Is A Problem
- Keystone Kids

Overview

- Sometimes behavior problems are what Ennio Cipani likes to refer to as “Direct-Access”
- This means that the behavior is maintained in a manner that does not require any social interactions of any kind
- Self-stimulatory behavior falls under this category
- Another major category is socially-mediated consequences (reinforcers or aversives)
- These are consequences that are mediated (given by) others

Overview

- The actions of others can mediate all sorts of reinforcers and aversives whether its just the reaction of the person or something the person gives you
- Once you're pretty sure that the problem is not a "direct-access" kind of problem then you can start asking whether the behavior occurs only with peers, only with adults, or occurs indiscriminately with everyone
- First let's look at issues related to peers

Peers as a source of aversives

- Aggression
- Teasing
- Reinforcer removal (children who snatch things from other children)
- Signaling the imminent loss of reinforcement (attention and/or other reinforcers). This is not done “on purpose” by one peer to other (we’ll come back to this)

Aggression

- ◎ “First strike”
 - May be prompted by aversive stimulation from peer or being subjected to just about any aversive
 - Can be maintained through “automatic” reinforcement (feeling better after an act of aggression)
 - Can be maintained by teacher attention
 - Can be maintained by reaction of child being hit
- ◎ Retaliatory-Aggression due to aggression

What to do about Aggression?

- For verbal individuals responding to aversives from peers:
 - Understand the conditions (motivation) under which the child attacks peers
 - Establish rules for what the child should do when the motivation to attack is high
 - AVOID rules like
 - No hitting!
 - Hands to yourself!
 - Quiet hands!
 - Be respectful!

What to do about Aggression?

- Even rules like “use your words” can be vague unless you specify what words to use and to which person they should be directed!
- A good rule should take into account:
 - Motivation for the misbehavior
 - Motivation to follow the rule
 - Replacement behavior
 - Good and bad consequences

Example:

- One child takes another child's toy
- The child who lost the toy attacks the other child
- Rule: 1) **If someone takes your stuff**, (motivation for hitting) 2) **come and get a teacher** (may or may not be a true replacement behavior for hitting but is at least in compatible with hitting) **and you will not lose any points** (consequence of rule following)

Example:

- You must reinforce rule following!
- If following the rule helps the child SOLVE HIS PROBLEM then the rule is MUCH MORE likely to be followed
- I get my toy back
- My classmate gets into trouble and not me and that makes me feel great!
- If following the rule solves YOUR problem (I need peace and quiet) then it is MUCH LESS likely to be followed (quiet hands).

Whose behavior needs fixin'?

- Sometimes the child who is aggressive is acting reasonably given what the other child is doing, sometimes not.
- How can you figure out whose behavior needs to be addressed? The victim, The aggressor, or both?
- We turn to.....
- **The GRID OF ACCEPTABILITY!**

The Grid of Acceptability!

Situation Behavior	Unacceptable	Unreasonable	Reasonable
Reasonable	1		
Unreasonable		2	
Unacceptable			3

The Grid of Acceptability!

- 1: A **reasonable** reaction (behavior) to an **unacceptable** situation. (What is reasonable for the individual will depend in large part on level of functioning and skill level)
- An individual bites, but **only** when attacked by another individual
- An individual begins to pound on furniture when other clients are screaming
- Is it a situation that might cause you to possibly “lose it?”

The Grid of Acceptability!

- 2: An **unreasonable** reaction to an **unreasonable** situation (an unreasonable situation is “not very nice” but something that *could* possibly be tolerated)
- Many problems fall into this category.
- Joey is playing with the fire-truck,
- Billy grabs it from him
- Joey commandeers a police car and clocks Billy in the head with it! (may be borderline unreasonable/unacceptable depending on severity)

The Grid of Acceptability!

- 3: An **unacceptable** reaction to a **reasonable** situation
- Ricky begins to engage in self-injurious eye-gouging (unacceptable behavior) whenever he hears another student coughing (reasonable situation)
- Do we buy a case of Robitussin™ for the entire classroom as an antecedent manipulation?

The Grid of Acceptability!

- Most of the time we are working with people who show unacceptable or unreasonable behavior in response to either **unreasonable** or **reasonable** situations
- There are times, however, when WE say that the person has a “behavior problem” but when you look at some of the unacceptable situations that happen to people with disabilities, it’s hard to say that the individual’s behavior is truly unreasonable or unacceptable

Teasing and Uncontrolled Reinforcers

- Teasing (peer-produced verbal aversives)
 - Typically a problem with higher-functioning individuals
 - You must address both the behavior of the teas-er and the teas-ee!

Teasing: The Teaser

- Behavior can be due to/maintained by:
- Reaction to an aversive from the teasee
- Maintained by the response of the teasee (crying, getting angry)
- Maintained by teacher attention
- Maintained by the ATTENTION OF NEARBY PEERS
- May result from a low rate of reinforcement in general (I can't get very much, very quickly but I sure as hell can tease YOU)

The Teaser: What to do?

- Reduce attention from peers (uncontrolled reinforcers) through rules about **continuing to work** when others are teasing and strong reinforcement for ignoring students behaving inappropriately
- Work on the behavior of the teasee if he or she is being obnoxious and prompting teasing

The Teaser: What to do?

- Show the teasee how to handle teasing. What to do, what to say, what not to say, where to go, etc. (If Shawn is being nasty to you, you may move to the back of the room and continue working, but don't say anything back to Shawn)
- Try NOT to correct the teaser right after teasing. It provides too much attention
- Use pre-correction

The Teaser: What to do?

- Using pre-correction you review expected behavior **BEFORE** the problem occurs
- This might include clear rules for interacting with others, what to do if there is a problem, rules for working without talking to others, etc.

The Teaser: What to do?

- If the teasing is happening because the teaser is bored or not engaged then this needs be addressed
- Sometimes individuals tease to “UP” their rate of reinforcement when things are uninteresting
- People who are already copping a lot of attention and/or praise and/or highly interested in the current activity will generally seek out teasing less

What about the Teas-ee?

- Teach non-reactive responses to teasing.
- “Okay”
- “Whatever”
- “Anything else?” (usually followed by 2 or 3 more teases)
- Role-play with the student to help desensitize them to name calling
- Teach teasee to remove himself to another area of the classroom (and therefore removing potential reinforcement for the teaser)

What else?

- We will address improving peer to peer relationships in general which will help improve the problem with excessive teasing

Peers as an uncontrolled source of reinforcement

- Whether you're dealing with teasing or general classroom disruption (calling out, making noises, riling up all the other students, setting a bad example, etc.) the behavior of peers can be a **HUGE** uncontrolled reinforcer.
- Uncontrolled reinforcers will **MESS YOU UP!**

Peers as an uncontrolled source of reinforcement

- What if you couldn't control edibles?
- What if you couldn't control the computer?
- Time on the playground?
- Gold stars?
- Toys/Prize box
- If you can't control the attention of peers it's like letting the child loose in a candy store.

Peers as an uncontrolled source of reinforcement

- Sometimes the child is seeking the reaction of a specific peer, as in the case of teasing or in the case of trying to impress one of the “cool kids”
- There is Peer-specific attention
- And Peer-group attention
- Sometimes it’s both
- John teases Timmy, Timmy gets mad, everyone else laughs—Double Whammy!

Peers as an uncontrolled source of reinforcement

- You may be able to shut down some of this nonsense with a clear group rule:
- **Teacher to her class: “If someone is trying to be funny I expect everyone else to keep working. Those of you who can keep working will earn an extra 5 minutes of computer time.”**
- **A star or sticker, or point can be given to students who continue to work when a wise-crack was made.**
- **In essence, you are trying to remove the audience**

Peers as an uncontrolled source of reinforcement

- It's important to set up contingencies of “continuous work” for all students
- Continuous work means you don't stop, you don't look up, you don't get out of your seat, you don't make a comment to a peer, nothing.
- You can start with very short intervals, but the work must be continuous to earn reinforcement

Peers as an uncontrolled source of reinforcement

- Give your students a REASON to avoid interacting with their peers and attending to their inappropriate behavior
- Most kids will get reinforcement for completing a task regardless of how many times they stopped working to interact with peers. There is no reason to ignore them, they can still get what they want.

Peers as competition for attention



SIBLING RIVALRY

Who do you love more now mom ?

Peers as competition for attention

- Individuals who require high levels of adult attention are often VERY sensitive to any changes in attention caused by other individuals
- Changes in attention can quickly and easily lead to behavior problems, specifically those problems that result in increased levels of attention
- There are two big categories of peer-related attention problems. 1) Attention loss and 2) Attention “party”

Attention loss

- ① 1) Adult is interacting with child A
- ① 2) Child B shows up and begins to interact with the teacher
- ① 3) All Hell breaks loose with child A!
- ① The most typical problems are that
 - 1) the child cannot tolerate even a momentary loss of attention and
 - 2) the child does not know how to (appropriately) regain attention

Attention Loss

- The child who loses attention might attack the teacher, or the other student or engage in some other inappropriate behavior that essentially demands attention
- The best approach in this case is to **PROACTIVELY** schedule regular mini-disruptions **AND** teach the child how to regain attention quickly, effectively, and appropriately

Attention Loss

- You can even give a mini assignment, and instructions to call the teacher's name when finished so you can reinforce both task completion and appropriately **REGAINING** attention
- There is a big difference between recruiting attention (that you don't have yet) and **REGAINING** attention that you just lost

Attention Loss

- Teacher: “Billy I’m going to talk to Sean for a moment, can you complete problem number 7 and then tell me when you’re done?”
- Billy: “Okay”
- Billy: (finishes problem) “Finished!”
- Teacher: (immediately stops her interaction with the other child steps back over towards Billy) “Let’s see, wow good job!”

Attention Loss

- These “attention withdrawal trials” MUST be scheduled, they CANNOT happen haphazardly with no warning, at least not initially

Attention Party

- This describes a situation that acts as a motivating operation (makes you suddenly want something that a moment ago you didn't want) that causes the child to seek attention
- Tiffany is minding her own business, not seeking attention
- The teacher is talking to Maria (another student) and laughing at something funny she said and Tiffany can see and hear the interaction
- Tiffany goes ballistic...

Attention Party

- Now three things can be going on here:
- 1) Tiffany doesn't really want attention, she just wants to cut off Maria's attention (it's aversive to Tiffany)
- 2) Tiffany doesn't so much care that Maria is getting attention, it's just that "She wants in"
- 3) A combination of 1 and 2

Attention Party

- How do we handle this problem? Just like the last one, schedule it!
- Arrange to have a peer nearby at a time when the individual with problem behavior is being pretty mellow
- Have a big fun interaction with the peer while also keeping a close eye on the other student
- When the other student's behavior is starting to go sideways, have a helper (who is less liked) quickly and quietly prompt the student to recruit attention from you (the primary teacher)
- Run to over to the student like he's on fire and have a nice little interaction
- Wash, Rinse, Repeat

Mere peer presence is a problem

- Sometimes the peer does absolutely nothing except “show up.”
- Some students, because of their history with peers, begin to have problems the moment another peer enters the room/treatment area
- In these cases the student’s presence may be indicting an upcoming aversive/reinforcer loss
- Very typical in “sibling rivalry” situations

Mere peer presence is a problem

- For the child with behavior problems, seeing the peer means that things will begin to suck more in 3, 2, 1...Suck!
- Here are 4 strategies you can use to try and remedy the situation and the are:

Mere peer presence is a problem

- ① 1. Peer presence results in an increase in attention for the child in question
 - Start off with no interactions with child A (the one with behavior problems)
 - Child B shows up
 - Immediately go over to child A give lavish attention
 - Child B leaves (you will probably need a helper)
 - Walk away from child A and/or stop your attention momentarily
 - Wash, Rinse, Repeat

Mere peer presence is a problem

- ② 2. Arrange for a very powerful reinforcer that is only available when both Jake and Bobby are *doing something together*.
- ③ *If the reinforcer is a very strong one, and the task is short and easy, you may find that Jake will start to get happy when Bobby approaches*
- ④ Bobby's approach now has a new meaning (yummy gummy bears are coming soon).

Mere peer presence is a problem

- ③ 3. Have the less liked peer (Bobby) mediate the reinforcer that is typically only mediated by the adult.
- ③ For example, instead of handing out the snack herself, the teacher might choose Bobby to start handing out the snacks and doing other nice things for Jake.
- ③ Again, Bobby's presence may start to gain new meaning and Jake might start to look forward to interacting with him.

Mere peer presence is a problem

- ④ 4. Provide large amounts of enthusiastic praise/attention to Jake when he is helpful to Bobby (Jake will have to be prompted about how to be helpful)
- ④ If Jake normally *loses reinforcement* because Bobby shows up, now he can produce *more reinforcement by actually helping Bobby in some way* (pro-social behavior)
- ④ These tactics can be used in combination

Keystone Kids



Keystone Kids

- These are kids that “ruin” your whole classroom
- Pull them out and bad-behavior house of cards comes tumbling down
- Bad behavior role models
- Require too much constant attention

Keystone Kids

- You may need to focus primarily on their behavior
- Teach strategies to other children to minimize reinforcement of the keystone kid's behavior
- Analyze the reinforcers/aversives for the keystone kid
- Instead of trying to make the keystone kid perfect, try to modify his behavior so that at least it is non-disruptive and does not pull the other students off-task