

Positive Reinforcement for Processing

The purpose of this handout is to give some suggestions for positive reinforcement for both auditory and visual processing activities (ADS, ACWS, AOS, VDS, VFD, VOS, etc.)

Effective reinforcement systems include tangible objects that can be accumulated and then used to “purchase” rewards.

Materials Needed:

1. Reward counter: marbles, pennies, colored paper clips, macaroni noodles, beans, buttons, pennies, etc., (objects you have in abundance)
2. Container for the reward counters: any kind of recycled plastic container such as a jelly or peanut butter jar, a decorated shoe box, a basket, etc. (something that will enable the child to see his small reward counters easily)
3. 3 x 5 cards or poster board charts can also be used, divided into sections to be filled in with stars, stickers, or dots
4. Reward chart (described below)

Procedure:

Explain to your child that you are going to start a new reward system for Digit Spans or any other auditory or visual processing activity on your program. Make sure he understands what he has to do to gain a reward counter (i.e. He currently can do a sequence of 4 but not 5. If he gets a 5 sequence correct **on the first try** then he gets the reinforcement). Make a colorful chart listing each possible reward and the amount of small reward counters required to “purchase” each reward. The age and abilities of the child need to be taken into consideration when determining how many reward counters are required for each reward. Younger or more seriously challenged children may not be able to earn as many reward counters each day. It would be a good idea to have some rewards that require only a few reward counters and others that require more.

Each time your child gets the desired number of sequences correct on the first try; he receives a reward counter (you can drop the reward counters in the jar if the reward counters are too distracting for the child). Whatever reward counters the child has at the end of the day, can be put into a container to go towards purchase of their chosen reward. Or the reward counters could be counted and a graph filled in to determine how close the child is to his/her goal.

Young children may need to “go shopping” daily, in order for this reinforcement to be effective. Parents can go to a Dollar Store/Dollar Tree/99¢ Store or to a garage sale or thrift store and stock up on grab bag items. Older children can go shopping once a week and purchase larger items such as bike accessories, sports equipment, clothes, DVD, trip to McDonalds, etc. The rewards could also be things that don’t cost money. See examples below.

Rewards do not have to be items bought from a store. Reward counters can be used to “purchase” TV time, time on computer games or Nintendo, or privileges such as: choosing the video to be watched on family night, choosing a favorite meal or restaurant, choosing the bedtime story, choosing the location of the family outing on the weekend (park, bowling, putt-putt, etc.), every day privileges such as snacks, talking to friends on telephone, cell phone or email, free time, a trip to the park or a picnic with Dad or even earning a half day off from program activities (to be used sparingly).

Rewards must be tangible. If they appear too hard to obtain, the promise of a reward will lose its effectiveness. On the other hand, if rewards are too plentiful, they will lose their value. A balance must be reached. Rewards work well if there are not too many freebies in the child’s life. If child gets a “treat” every day or every time the family goes to the store, it makes no sense to the child to have to work for a similar reward. Also, if TV time is free, why pay for it with your reward counters? It would be good for rewards to also change from time to time. The purpose of the reward system is for the child to be motivated to try his/her very best during the intense, very short processing sessions.