

MODULE: REINFORCEMENT

REINFORCER CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

Positive Reinforcement: Marley

Marley is a 4-year-old girl with ASD, who receives services within an inclusive preschool program. Although Marley has good verbal communication skills, she does not interact much with her peers. Marley’s teacher, Ms. Martin, often observes Marley lining up animals in the block area or wandering the room during free play. Ms. Martin and Marley’s parents would like Marley to talk and play more with peers at school. Ms. Martin decides to use positive reinforcement to increase Marley’s peer interactions because she has responded well to reinforcement in the past.

Before implementing the intervention, Ms. Martin and Marley’s parents identify the following target behavior: *Marley will exchange materials with peers three times during free play without prompting from classroom staff for three consecutive days.*

Once the target behavior has been identified, Ms. Martin begins collecting baseline data. Over the course of four days, Ms. Martin collects event sampling data during free play to determine Marley’s current use of the target skill. The data reveal that Marley only exchanged materials with peers one time and was prompted by the teaching assistant to do so.

Next, Ms. Martin establishes the following performance criteria, which will be used to monitor Marley’s progress.

Target skill: Marley will exchange materials with peers three times during free play without prompting from classroom staff for three consecutive days.	
<i>Performance Criterion</i>	<i>Behavior</i>
Phase 1	Marley will exchange materials with peers three times during free play when prompted by classroom staff.
Phase 2	Marley will exchange materials with peers one time during free play without prompting from classroom staff.
Phase 3	Marley will exchange materials with peers three times during free play without prompting from classroom staff.

After determining the performance criteria, Ms. Martin identifies positive reinforcers that will be used to motivate Marley to exchange materials with peers during free play. To accomplish this step, Ms. Martin completes a series of activities.

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First, she thinks about items or activities that motivate other children in the class. For example, most of the children are excited to receive stickers, praise from adults, extra time on the computer, and pats on the back. She also knows that many of the children get excited when they are able to use toys and other materials that are not accessible all of the time, such as bubbles and flashlights. She wonders if some of these items might be motivating to Marley as well.

Second, Ms. Martin considers possible natural reinforcers for exchanging materials with peers during free play. She knows how important these types of reinforcers are because they make generalization of skills easier. She decides that Marley might be motivated by the following natural reinforcers: longer, more positive interactions with peers and receiving a desired item in return.

Third, Ms. Martin observes Marley during free play to identify preferred toys and areas of the classroom. She also wants to see if Marley responds positively to any phrases or gestures used by peers or adults in the classroom. Through her observations, Ms. Martin determines that Marley plays with small, plastic animals in the block area most often. Marley also spends a large amount of time watching as peers build towers and knock them down. Marley often laughs and claps her hands as the blocks fall to the floor.

Next, Ms. Martin talks with Marley's parents about the kinds of reinforcers that have worked in the past. They tell Ms. Martin that Marley has not responded well to verbal praise and other social reinforcers such as pats on the back and thumbs-up. Instead, Marley tends to be motivated by food items such as candy and popcorn.

After talking with Marley's parents, Ms. Martin decides to conduct a reinforcer sampling to identify activities and materials that might motivate Marley to use the target skill. During free play, Ms. Martin gathers a variety of objects and food items that she has identified as possible reinforcers for Marley, such as M&M's, popcorn, plastic animals, blocks, stickers, bubbles, and a flashlight. Ms. Miller takes them to a quiet area of the classroom where a table is set up and places them on the floor next to her chair. Ms. Martin then calls Marley over to the table and asks her to sit down in the chair across from her. As soon as Marley is seated, Ms. Martin holds up two items and says, "Pick one." Ms. Martin completes the reinforcer sampling in this manner until all of the items have been used. Through this process, Ms. Martin determines that Marley prefers the food items, bubbles, and the plastic animals. She uses this information to create a reinforcer menu; however, she decides that it will be used only to communicate with other classroom staff about potential reinforcers for Marley. Ms. Martin plans to embed the reinforcers within the teaching activity so that they are more natural, making it easier to generalize use of the target skill across settings and activities.

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Before implementing reinforcement, Ms. Martin plans her teaching activity and how the reinforcement will be delivered. To teach the target skill, Ms. Miller will engage typically developing peers in a block-building activity and then bring Marley to the area. As the children are completing their block tower, Ms. Martin will prompt Marley to give the final block to one of the children. Since Marley seemed to enjoy the falling tower, Ms. Martin hopes that this will be reinforcing for her. As Marley begins to use the target skill independently, Ms. Martin will prompt her less often so that she does not become dependent on Ms. Martin's prompts to exchange materials with peers.

Ms. Martin also plans to work on exchanging materials during snack time using popcorn as the reinforcer. During this activity, Ms. Martin will prompt Marley to say, "Popcorn, please." to the peer seated next to her. When she does so, Marley will be able to take the bowl of popcorn from the peer and put some popcorn on her plate. Ms. Martin will then prompt Marley to pass the popcorn to the peer seated on the other side of her. At the beginning of the intervention, Ms. Martin plans to reinforce Marley each time she passes the bowl to the peer sitting next to her by saying, "Good job, Marley." while also patting Marley on the back. As Marley begins to exchange snack materials with peers independently, Ms. Martin will provide reinforcement less often. For example, she will praise Marley every 3 to 5 times she exchanges materials at snack time. Ms. Martin also plans to vary the reinforcer during snack time so that Marley does not grow tired of popcorn. Ms. Martin knows that Marley also likes goldfish and cheese crackers. Therefore, she will alternate the food provided during snack so that Marley continues to be motivated to use the target skill.

Finally, Ms. Martin is going to focus on the target skill during circle time. Each day at the beginning of circle time, Ms. Martin plans to pass a bubble jar from peer to peer. Each peer will have a chance to blow bubbles. When the bubbles get to Marley, Ms. Martin will prompt her to say, "Bubbles, please." to the peer sitting next to her. When she does this, Marley will receive the bubbles as the reinforcer. Ms. Martin will also prompt Marley to pass the bubbles to the peer sitting on the other side of her and provide reinforcement when she does so (e.g., "Good job, Marley."). As Marley begins to pass the bubbles independently, Ms. Martin will reinforce Marley's use of the skill more sporadically. For example, she will reinforce the behavior every 3 to 5 times rather than every time. Because many of these reinforcers are related to the activities in the classroom, Ms. Martin feels that they will be naturally motivating to Marley and will encourage her to interact more independently with peers.