

# Lecture No. 11

## Principles of Behaviour Correction

**PRINCIPLE 1: Negative consequences sometimes change behavior, but they do not change attitude.**

In children who consider consequence structures, negative consequences such as time out, sentence writing, restriction of privileges, verbal correction, and physical punishment, as well as others, will affect at least temporary behavior change. Unless used in combination with equally powerful positive reinforcement strategies, they will, however, worsen the negative attitudes that underlie the misbehavior and increase the likelihood of subsequent misbehavior. So, these temporary changes should not be made permanent by negative handling.

**PRINCIPLE 2: Only positive reinforcement strategies produce long-term attitudinal change.**

As children grow older and into adulthood, positive behavior is not maintained through the threat of negative consequences; it is maintained because the individual has an internal attitude or value system, which discriminates between right and wrong behaviors. In the long term, children behave properly because they want to, not because they are forced to.

**PRINCIPLE 3: Negative consequences do not improve the behavior of impulsive children and frequently increase the frequency and intensity of misbehavior.**

Impulsive children, by definition, do not consider the consequence structure prior to initiation of the behavior. No matter how negative the consequence, it cannot influence behavior unless it is considered prior to the behavior itself. In impulsive children, the consideration of the consequences comes after the behavior, meaning that it has been outside conscious cognitive control. When punished for behaviors that are outside their control, they learn helplessness and respond emotionally with anger, resignation, and eventually depression.

**PRINCIPLE 4: Cognitive control of behavior can be learned through the use of appropriate positive reinforcement systems.**

Even very impulsive and behaviorally difficult children can learn greater behavioral control through cognitive strategies. Time out works very well if used for brief periods for the purpose of establishing emotional control and behavioral calm, and if the time-out period is followed by cognitive discussion of the reasons for misbehavior with appropriate positive alternatives. Where possible, the alternative positive behaviors should be practiced and positively reinforced, even if the behavior occurs only with the direct instigation of an adult.

**PRINCIPLE 5: Positive reinforcement systems must be incremental in nature such that the child can directly observe even small improvements in behavior.**

Many children with significant behavioral problems are very discouraged regarding the possibility that they can effect positive changes in their lives. Positive reinforcement systems which have expectations set too high, such that it is difficult for the child to earn rewards at the outset are a cause of further discouragement and have a negative effect on esteem. Systems that have expectations too low however, where almost all children

involved in the program receive the same reward, devalue the accomplishments of the child who makes very significant progress, and can be equally esteem defeating. Well-designed positive reinforcement systems rely on incremental rewards where the range of reinforcement varies from no reinforcement to mild reinforcement to moderate reinforcement to intense reinforcement, so that the child can witness in a visible and tangible way relative levels of progress.

**PRINCIPLE 6: You must always reinforce the final compliance with adult authority no matter how long it takes to get there.**

Many children in management systems require numerous requests, or even commands, before their behavior finally complies with adult expectation. The tendency is to not provide positive reinforcement after many reminders, since adult patience is limited and the adult expectation is that the child should do what he is told the first time. Unfortunately, if no positive reinforcement is provided following the final compliance, all that children learn is that there is no reason to comply.

Besides these principles, there are many other techniques which help to correct or modify the problematic behavior of students.

**1. Positive Reinforcement**

This is applied where there is a need to promote desirable behaviour. You want to encourage a student to keep tidy books. You observe the target behaviour, and reward it with praise or a prize.

**2. Extinction or Ignore Technique**

This is applied when a student's behaviour (usually self-defeating), is best eliminated. The undesired behaviour is simply ignored rather than punished or reinforced. One particular pupil in your class often attracts your attention by calling out 'Sir, Sir,' instead of putting up his hand. Calling out to you is distracting, especially if all pupils do it at the same time. You could ignore such a pupil, until he puts up his hand. Drawing the student's attention to the strategy may increase its effectiveness, as will consistency in application.

**3. The Modelling Technique**

You could use this technique to help your pupils adopt new behaviour. The pupil is made to observe a role model (usually someone she admires or an authority) demonstrate desirable behaviour, or condemn undesirable behaviour. A pupil in an upper class can, for example, be a model for pupils in a lower one. By observing him/her, other pupils may learn to do the same.

**4. The Punishment Technique**

This is used when it becomes necessary to apply an aversion stimulus to correct undesirable behaviour. When you see the many techniques available for modifying behaviour, you may realize that this technique has been over used. Schools have been known to use good, honest work as 'punishment,' leading to stigmatization in students' minds. Examples of this may include cutting grass or digging in the school garden.

**5. Systematic Desensitization Technique**

This technique is effective when dealing with anxiety and other fear-related problems. The individual is given small doses of what is feared until a relaxed response is built up. For example, a student who fears to speak in class may first practice speaking only with the teacher. When she is comfortable with that, she may be given an opportunity to speak

with the teacher and two classmates. After that, she may try to become involved in a small discussion group, and so on until her fear is mastered and she gains the confidence to speak in class.

#### **6. The Technique of Over-Correction**

This technique is used when a mild punishment is administered for purposes of reducing disruptive behaviour. As Achebe (cited in Nwoye, 1990) has explained, it requires the culprit to restore the environment he has damaged to a better condition than existed before his disruptive behaviour occurred. This is effective when a student writes on a wall or carves on a school desk. Scrubbing, painting or sanding damaged property may produce effective behavioural changes in the future.

#### **7. The Time-out Technique**

Time-out is used to control the occurrence of undesirable behaviour in pupils by the withdrawal of privileges in the event of the occurrence of undesirable behaviour. A student who disrupts classmates in the library, for example, will probably do so because he is reinforced by doing so. The loss of library privileges, or sitting alone for a period of time while others are together, may help to eliminate the problem behaviour.

#### **8. The Technique of Negative Reinforcement**

Negative reinforcement is used to encourage the occurrence of desirable behaviour by removing obstacles against recurrence. Bed-wetting is often caused by late-night drinks. Eliminating after dinner drinks, and perhaps instituting a wakening late at night for going to the toilet, may help achieve a dry bed.

#### **9. The Response Cost Technique**

This technique is used to eliminate undesirable behaviour by making the culprit forfeit something valuable. When a student fails to eat canteen food, he may lose access to canteen privileges.

#### **10. The Shaping Technique**

Shaping develops desirable complex human behaviour. This is related to the above example of systematic desensitization. Small successful steps are linked together to produce major behaviour changes. A dirty student may first be taught to bathe daily, and after a consistent behaviour change is made, hair combing may be addressed, laundry care, etc.

#### **11. Assertiveness Training**

Assertiveness training is used to help pupils control excessive shyness, and other fear-related problems, that impede their ability to live fully. Assertiveness training is a widely used behavioural technique. It is based on a combination of modelling and operant reinforcement approaches. Its purpose is to teach people how to stand up for themselves without being aggressive.