

## Step-By-Step Procedure For Decreasing Behaviors

Try this procedure if you want the child to be more compliant and decrease any behavior issues. Basically, the goal will be to give him a reinforcer if he does not do the inappropriate behavior in a specified period of time. Positive feedback will be given during that period of time to reinforce the appropriate behavior he is demonstrating and to remind him of the reinforcer he will receive if he is successful.

Step 1: Find out what the child wants to work for.

Step 2: Explain the rules

Step 3: Decide how long the child has to wait before receiving the reinforcer

Step 4: Start the timer

Step 5: Praise the child during the time period

Step 6: Give the consequence: either give the reinforcer or reset the timer.

### Step 1: Find out what the child wants to work for

Reinforcers are the most important factor that will motivate the child to follow your instructions. It should be something you can give him that day. If you wait too long to give the reinforcer, the child may forget the reason for receiving the reinforcer. Examples can be food, toys, time playing video games or watching YouTube, etc..

Things to remember when choosing reinforcers:

a) The effort required to do the behavior should equal the quality of the reinforcer. For example, if you are teaching the child to wear his clothes independently, and he can already do it correctly 7 out of 10 days, then he doesn't require a big reinforcer to motivate him. If, however, the child can only wear his clothes correctly 4 out of 10 days, then doing this task is challenging for him, so a bigger reinforcer should be given.

b) The importance of doing the behavior:

Teaching the child to remember to put his toys away is not as important as teaching him to not hit other people. Decreasing aggressive behaviors is a priority. The child should be offered one of the biggest reinforcers if he can decrease his hitting behavior.

c) Keep in mind each child is different. Being able to eat five M&M's might mean a lot to a child who does not often eat candy, so this could be a big reinforcer to this child. Five M&M's might be a small reinforcer to another child though, if he is used to eating a lot of candy.

d) Consider how many reinforcers you will give and the time period you have to give them. For instance, if you work with the child only for one hour, the child cannot be given a reinforcer like playing 10 minutes of a video game. Spending a lot of time on the reinforcer will take away the time you have to teach the child. If the class is only one hour long, the reinforcers should be something the child can receive quickly, and then it will disappear quickly like small snacks. The child eats a small piece and then it's gone.

To figure out what a child likes, do a reinforcer assessment. Make a list of things your child likes and rank them depending on how much he likes them. The things he really likes are the "big" reinforcers. The things he likes less can be called the "small" reinforcers. For example, going to the zoo is a big reinforcer. It requires a lot of time, money, and effort to bring him there. Giving him some cookies is a small reinforcer. It doesn't take a lot of time, money, or effort to buy some cookies.

Print this list out to make it easily assessable. When the child is tantruming and it's hard to think clearly, having this list will help you figure out more quickly what to do next.

Printing the list of reinforcers out is also a helpful way to inform other caretakers what to use to reinforce the child. Everybody should use the same reinforcers for the same behavior. If Mom is giving a big reinforcer while Dad is giving a small reinforcer for the same behavior, the child will be confused and respond inconsistently.

## Step 2: Explain the rules

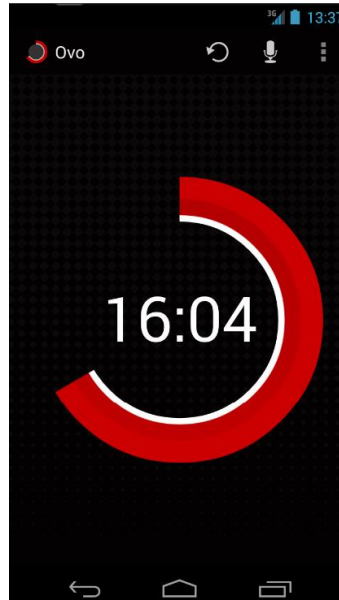
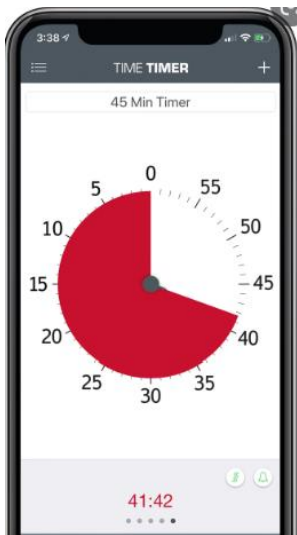
Decide which behaviors to target. If you want to decrease the child's yelling, explain to the child, "If you do not yell before the timer rings, you can have (the reinforcer)." Define the target behavior clearly using words the child will understand. For yelling, it can be defined as talking louder than the typical talking voice. After explaining to the child, ask him to define the behavior to you to confirm he understood what you said. Ask him, "What is the rule?" The child should respond by saying something like, "No yelling."

When starting this procedure, try to target only one or two behaviors to keep it simple. Once the child understands the procedure, add more behaviors if needed. To remind the child of the rules, write them out on a piece of paper. If the child cannot read the words, draw simple pictures to represent the rules. For example, if your child cannot read the word "yell," draw a picture of a face and a speech bubble/ balloon next to the mouth to signify yelling. Put this near the child so that seeing the paper will remind him to follow the rules and the reinforcer he will get if he follows them.

## Step 3: Decide how long the child has to wait before receiving the reinforcer

Asking a child not to tantrum during the whole day at school may be a very difficult task to accomplish if the child usually tantrums a few times each day. Using a timer to break the whole day into shorter periods of time will make it easier for the child to achieve the goal. For example,

explain to the child, "If you do not tantrum before the timer rings (30 minutes), then you can have a snack."



To keep track of time, use a timer app on a cell phone or you can purchase a timer. For younger children that are not familiar with a regular clock, use a visual timer. A visual timer looks like a clock but without the long and short hands. Once you start the timer, the amount of color on the clock will start to decrease to show that the amount of time is decreasing. Once there is no time left on the timer, all the color will disappear and a chime/sound will start to play.

You can click on the link below to find timer apps and separate timers you can purchase.

<https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/11/06/20-visual-timers-for-children-with-special-needs/>

To determine how long to set the timer for, recall how often the child demonstrates the target behavior per day or per hour. Use that as a reference. Keep in mind you want the child to be successful at achieving the goal especially when the procedure is first implemented. Once the child earns the reinforcer, they will understand how the procedure works and will be more motivated to follow the rules. As an example, if a child yells five times per hour, try setting the timer for five minutes. Once the child is successful (i.e. receives the reinforcer) five consecutive times, then try increasing the time to six minutes. Each child will respond differently. Increase the amount of time as you see fit keeping in mind you want the child to be successful 85% of the time.

#### Step 4: Start the timer

After confirming the child understands the rule(s) and procedure start the timer. Leave the timer out where the child can see it. It will act as a visual reminder to behave appropriately. You can also show the reinforcer to remind him what he is working for. If you cannot show him the

reinforcer, showing him a picture of it or something that reminds him of it will help him. For instance, if he wants to watch videos as his reinforcer, show him the remote control as a reminder of the video.

Some children may focus too much attention on looking at the clock or the reinforcer. In that case, hide these items, but show them every once in a while because those items serve an important purpose: the clock tells them how much time they still need to wait, and the reinforcer reminds them of what they are working for.

#### Step 5: Praise the child during the time period

Not being able to easily remember information is a characteristic of children with ASD. Because of this, one of the main reasons why children with ASD keep doing the same inappropriate behaviors is because they forget the rules and consequences of their actions. To help them remember the rules, give the child positive feedback while the timer is running. This feedback reinforces the good behavior they are currently demonstrating and serves as a reminder of the consequences.

Your feedback can be in the form of verbal praise ("good talking nicely," "I like the way you are keeping your hands down," "good job following the rules"). You can also ask a quick question to clearly remind him of the rules: "Are you talking nicely," "are you following the rules," "did you rock your body?" Once the child responds, give him a quick praise like, "That's great!" You can also give a simple smile or thumbs up if giving a verbal praise is too distracting to others in the room. Another effective feedback is showing the reinforcer to them to remind them what they are working for. If snacks are the reinforcer, briefly hold up the snacks for them to see. If watching videos is the reinforcer, point to the computer.

To determine how often you should offer this feedback, consider how often in the past did they perform the target behavior(s). If they, for example, talked to themselves at least once every three minutes, give a quick feedback approximately every 50 seconds. Once the child achieves more success with this procedure, you can increase the amount of time before praising him. In our example, instead of praising every 50 seconds, now try praising approximately every 90 seconds. If, on the other hand, the child has difficulty achieving success, praise sooner at approximately every 35 seconds instead of 50 seconds. Keep in mind you want the child to be successful about 85% of the time, so adjust the time accordingly.

#### Step 6: Give the consequence: either give the reinforcer or reset the timer.

After the timer rings, if the child did not perform the target behavior(s), give him the reinforcer. If the child performs the target behavior before the timer rings, tell the child, for example, "You yelled. No snack. Reset the timer." Immediately reset the timer and show the reinforcer to the child to remind him what he is working for.

#### Making adjustments to the procedure

Behavior plans often need adjustments. Here are some adjustments that can be made to make it more effective:

### 1. Shorten the total time period.

Notice when the child is doing the inappropriate behavior. If the child keeps doing it towards the end of the time period right before the timer rings, the data is telling you he cannot control himself for that length of time. Shorten the timer period.

### 2. Shorten the time before giving a positive feedback.

If you are giving a verbal praise every 30 seconds but he keeps doing the inappropriate behavior, short that time to 20 seconds. Once he achieves success 5 consecutive times, try going back to 30 seconds. If his behavior continues to be steady after that, increase the time and try praising every 45 seconds.

### 3. Check the reinforcer

Maybe he liked cookies the first time you ran the procedure, but then he stopped liking the cookies. To be sure he is picking a reinforcer he likes, show it to him and see his reaction. Does he keep looking at it or opens his hand to grab it if you tried to offer it to him. These are signs that he really wants it. If possible, show him all the available reinforcers and let him point to it or give it to you.

### 4. Make the reinforcer more visible after the timer starts

Show him the reinforcer more often during the time period. The positive feedback might not be enough to remind him of the consequence. When it is time to praise him, show the reinforcer as well. If using snacks, take out the snack from its package and put it on a piece of tissue so that he can easily see it.

### 5. Make sure he understands the target behavior.

Make sure he remembers the target behavior you are working on, and how he can earn the reinforcer. Ask him, "If you want the snack, what do you have to do?" He should say something like, "Don't yell." You can also ask, "If you yell, can you have the cookies?" He should say, "No."

Also keep in mind various factors that can influence children's behavior:

- a) The amount of sleep they had the night before. Being tired can put people in a bad mood.
- b) How hungry a child is can affect their behavior. If you are using snacks as reinforcers and the child is already full, he might not be motivated to work for snacks. If this is the case, try other kinds of reinforcers like videos, toys, music, etc.

c) Any changes at home such as a parent on a business trip or the child's brother is at summer camp. These can significantly influence the child if she is attached to that person and is used to being with them.