

Pairing

WHAT IS IT?

When two items or activities are consistently experienced together, the perceived value of one will influence the perceived value of the other. A positive relationship between the teacher and student can be fostered with this process. Through repeated pairing sessions, connections are made between the reinforcers and the giver of the reinforcers. Pairing is ongoing and should be a regular part of teaching and play sessions.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Pairing is used to establish yourself or the learning environment as a reinforcer. If a student won't come to the table, it makes teaching challenging. With adequate pairing, the student should begin to see interactions as fun so escape and avoidance behaviors are prevented. The student will begin to make choices that will maintain those interactions.

WHEN CAN IT BE USED?

Pairing can happen any time and anywhere. It is useful when developing a relationship with students. If a student refuses to go to a place or activity, pairing can establish it as one where reinforcement is accessed. Pairing also assists in establishing instructional control, meaning the child listens to you and complies with instructions.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

1. 75% of every interaction should include pairing yourself with fun activities and known reinforcement. For example, if it takes 15 seconds for your student to answer three instructions, you should then spend 45 seconds pairing before giving the next instruction.
2. Pairing activities should be led by the student's motivation and should include 7 targeted pairing skills as seen in figure 1.
3. To start the pairing process, observe the student when he has free access to items that may be reinforcing and observe what he is drawn to.
4. Join the student by being within arm's reach.
5. Comment on what the student is doing using specific praise as long as the student is engaging appropriately (which may need to be specified before starting the procedure).
6. As the student engages in play, vocally mirror what the student is doing (repeat words/vocalizations).
7. Physically mirror the student as well by imitating actions the student makes.
8. Give brief descriptions of what the student is doing well. (The tiger is roaring).
9. Initiate further actions by adding to the play or introducing additional items (Make a tiger walk over to the lion)
10. Create new activities with other items (put the tiger up to your ear like a phone and start talking)

HOW TO IMPLEMENT, CONTINUED

7 Pairing Skills from Lugo, et al., 2017

Fig. 1

Skill	Definition	Example
Proximity	Adult stays within an arm's reach of the student	If the child was playing with blocks, was the therapist within arm's reach
Praise	The adult uses specific praise to engage the student and point out pro-social play skills he is using.	Staff—"Awesome job stacking the blocks!"
Reflect	Adult repeats words or vocalizations made by the student.	Child—"boom-boom" Staff—"boom-boom, crash!" Percent of opportunities
Imitate	The adult imitates what the student is doing, being sure to imitate the desired behaviors and not give attention to problem behaviors.	Child opens a book Staff opens a book
Describe	The adult verbally describes the desirable play skills the student is engaging in.	Staff—"You are driving the car!"
Initiate	The adult offers tangible items to the student.	Rolling a toy car down their arm and placing it in the child's hand
Create	The adult shifts to a new activity by changing an item's function.	Using an animal as a phone

To view a short video, scan here:



REFERENCES

- Kearney, A. J. (2015). Understanding applied behavior analysis: An introduction to aba for parents, teachers, and other professionals (2nd ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Lugo, A. M., King, M. L., Lamphere, J. C. and McArdle, P. E.. 2017. Developing procedures to improve Therapist-Child Rapport in Early Intervention. Behavior Analysis in Practice, 10, 395-401.
- Sundberg, M. L., & Partington, J. W. (1999). The need for both discrete trial and natural environment language training for children with autism. In P. M. Ghezzi, W. L. Williams & J.E. Carr (Eds.) Autism: Behavior analytic perspectives. Reno, NV: Context Press.
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