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Behavior Modification

Raising children is a hard task that requires various skills and knowledge from several sources and backgrounds. My parents took several parenting classes before I was born in order to learn different methods of parenting. Their favorite class was psychology based with a focus on behavior modifications. Behavior modification was a major topic of the class and was a large component of their parenting styles. Parents can influence their child’s behavior in a positive, efficient way using behavior modification.

Behavior modification is used in many situation, especially with children, to change the way a person acts in certain situations. This technique requires using operant conditioning skills to change the incorrect behavior into the desired behavior. Operant conditioning involves reinforcing the desired behavior after the behavior is demonstrated. Reinforcement can be positive or negative. Negative behavior is not a stereotypical punishment, but rather an attempt to increase the desired behavior by removing something pleasurable. Positive reinforcement increases the behavior by adding something pleasurable. Reinforcement can be delivered through several schedules. Continuous reinforcement is reinforcement given after each correct response. This type of reinforcement allows for quick learning of the behavior, but if reinforcement stops then the behavior is prone to stop faster than with other types of reinforcement. A child is reinforced after a certain number of responses is a fixed ratio schedule of reinforcement. There are two types of reinforcement, primary and secondary. Primary reinforcers meet a basic need, while secondary reinforcers are paired with a primary reinforcer in order to become reinforcing. An example of a secondary reinforcer would be a star. A child would receive a star after every desired behavior, continuous reinforcement. After the child receives a certain number of stars they exchange the stars for candy. This involves a fixed ratio schedule of reinforcement with a primary reinforcer. This system is called a token economy, because the desired behavior is rewarded with tokens or a similar object, in this case stars. Behavior modification is a process that involves many aspects operant conditioning.

My parents used behavior modification while they were potty-training me. I only have one kidney, so I have to use the restroom more than most people. When I was little I did not want to stop what I was doing to go to the bathroom. My parents used operant conditioning, specifically behavior modification in order to teach me to use the restroom. Each time I successfully used the restroom I was rewarded with a star. The reinforcement was constant in the token economy. I put the star on the board that was hung on the bathroom door as a constant reminder of the desired behavior. At first I was awarded a star and a piece of candy, but after a while I was only awarded candy after ten stars. This represents a fixed ratio of reinforcement, because I was rewarded after a set number of stars. Obviously, my parents were not going to reward me for using the restroom for the rest of my life, so they gradually changed the schedule of reinforcement. Each time I earned a star or piece of candy, my parents would clap and cheer for me. I began to associate the praise with the candy. Since candy was reinforcing, the praise had the same effect. The praise was a secondary reinforcer. I was reacting to the praise, so the candy was no longer necessary. I began to go to the bathroom consistently on my own without any reinforcement. Their reinforcement through a token economy motivated me to use the restroom on my own. My parents used behavior modification to encourage and teach me to use the restroom.

Behavior modification can be used in many elements of life with people of any age. My parents taught me a valuable skill through operant conditioning in a token economy with behavioral modification. I plan to use a similar plan with my children one day after seeing how successful the method was in teaching me. Psychology based parenting is an effective way to teach children appropriate and necessary actions, specifically through behavior modification.