

Tip 2: Encouraging Engagement



Watch this video

- [Video - Tip 2: Encouraging Engagement](#)

Definition

As discussed in Tip 1: Motivating Children (First–Then,) reinforcement is the agreed preferred activity, item or praise that is given to your child immediately after they demonstrate the desired tasks, actions or demands, so that it encourages engagement and increases the use of positive behaviour.

Remember, it is **very** important to be consistent so that your child trusts that reinforcement will follow, as agreed, and will be positive for them.

If you want to see frequent positive behaviour, you need to reinforce it.

Every – Single – Time

Benefits

- It feels good to provide reinforcement.
- It feels good to receive reinforcement. Gaining adult attention is often one of the most powerful reinforcers for children.
- Reinforcement can be individualised. Reinforcers change as we grow and our interests and preferences change.
- Reinforcement can help teach expected and useful replacement behaviour/s that reduce the need for children to engage in challenging behaviour/s. Reinforcement supports children to maintain the use of positive and productive behaviour/s, which helps to keep them actively engaged in their learning.

Using this tip

All behaviours serve a purpose.

The four main reasons for behaviours	SENSORY STIMULATION (gain or avoid)	ESCAPE/AVOID TASK	ATTENTION (gain or avoid)	TANGIBLE (food, toys)
Examples (not an exhaustive list)	Fidgeting, tapping pen.	Asking for a break, leaving the room, refusing to do a task.	Raising hand, calling out, hitting.	Playing on laptop/tablet.
Purpose of the behaviour to the individual	Provides preferred sensory experiences that feel good.	Removes undesired activities or interactions.	Provides access to people or to interactions.	Provides access to preferred activities or items.

Note: one behaviour can occur for multiple reasons, e.g. making inappropriate comments to make peers/siblings laugh (gain peer attention) and to be sent out of the room (escape a task).

If a child is calling out (to gain attention), telling them off (giving them attention) will only reinforce this behaviour. Likewise, if a child is raising their hand (to gain attention), calling on them to respond (giving them attention) will reinforce and increase this behaviour.

Before responding to the behaviour, it is best to consider the reasons for that behaviour in order to deliver the most appropriate reinforcement.

Parents are not expected to identify the reasons for the behaviour on the spot or by themselves. If your child appears to be actively disengaged in learning tasks at home (such as homework) and/or is displaying some challenging behaviour/s, even after attempted use of reinforcement and other engagement strategies, please contact your child's school and speak with your child's teacher and the wellbeing team to discuss what further supports might be useful.

Ideas for positively supporting independence at home

Here are some examples of reinforcements you can offer your child for achieving engagement goals (e.g. completing homework quietly or following an instruction straight away).

See what ideas you can come up with.

- Pick a game to play
- Pack up early and have free time
- Play outside for 10 minutes
- Stickers/stamps
- Praise and nonverbal communication (e.g. smile, nod, thumbs up)
- Social attention (e.g. conversation about hobbies/interests)

Remember to always give descriptive praise alongside reinforcement (e.g. 'I love how you started your homework as soon as I asked, you can choose a sticker').

IMMEDIATE	DESCRIPTIVE
<p>Reinforce engaging behaviour as it occurs or immediately after.</p> <p>Behaviours for attention.</p> <p>✓ Example: 'Thank you for completing your homework quietly.'</p> <p>X Non-example: 'Good job last week.'</p> <p>Behaviours to avoid or escape.</p> <p>✓ Example: 'Nice work completing your science homework; you can take a five-minute break outside now.'</p> <p>X Non-example: 'Do this task now to earn a five-minute break at the end of the week.'</p>	<p>Provide descriptive specific praise in order to identify what exact skill you are reinforcing so that the child (and other children listening) can replicate the action again in the future.</p> <p>✓ Example: 'Great work sounding out the words you didn't know!'</p> <p>X Non-example: 'Good try.'</p>
POSITIVE	FREQUENT
<p>Word your praise positively. Reinforce the desired behaviour; do not reinforce the absence of undesired behaviour.</p> <p>✓ Example: 'Thank you for keeping your hands to yourself.'</p> <p>X Non-example: 'Thank you for not hitting.'</p>	<p>Regular reinforcement increases a child's engagement. It is fine to say 'no' and deliver a reprimand, as long as more praise statements than reprimands are stated. Aim for a 4:1 ratio - four praise statements for each reprimand.</p> <p>When a reprimand is used, tell the student what to do instead.</p> <p>✓ Example: say, 'Don't wander around the room, sit in your chair please.'</p> <p>X Non-example: 'Stop that.'</p> <p>When learning a new skill, provide reinforcement frequently and then slowly reduce the rate of reinforcement over time (do not fade it out entirely).</p>



Best Practice Tips

When using the Encouraging Engagement tip:

- be consistent
- offer a range of preferred activities/items for your child to choose from
- always tell your child why they are getting praised
- use non-verbal communication, as well as verbal praise
- provide reinforcement immediately after positive behaviour.

Handy resources

- [Praise, encouragement and rewards](#)