



COMPANION GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Use the Companion Guide for Families to assist with using reinforcement in your home.

The AFIRM for Paras modules were developed for paraprofessionals at elementary schools. However, the practices outlined in the modules can be helpful for families to use at home and can be used with a variety of ages. This companion guide is designed to offer a brief description of steps for reinforcement and provides some ideas of how you might use it in your home.

What is Reinforcement?

Reinforcement is used to increase a desired behavior or skill by giving a child a reward after the desired behavior or skill is used.

Positive reinforcement

When rewards are used to increase a desired skill or behavior.

Token economy

A type of positive reinforcement system in which a child receives a token as a reward each time they use the target skill or behavior. After earning a certain number of tokens, the child earns a reward that they really like (e.g. time on iPad, a favorite show, time with Legos). Tokens can be anything – stickers, check marks, cards, blocks.



What are the steps for using reinforcement?

1. Identify the behavior or task

Choose the behavior that you will focus on while using reinforcement with your child. Think about what you want the child to do, how you would like them to demonstrate the behavior, and when this behavior or task would be performed.





| WHAT | HOW | WHEN |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Completing chores | Choosing a chore from a list (washing dishes, putting toys away, making bed, laundry) | At least 1 time per day |
| Playing quietly | With several favorite activities in their room | While I am working at home |
| Finishing homework | At the table with help from family if needed | Late afternoons |
| Getting dressed | Pick clothes from closet | Each morning |
| Following a one-step direction | Doing as told by parent (Put away the..., Get the..., Stand up, etc.) | During transitions |
| Exercise | Select an exercise activity from a list (walking outside, jumping on trampoline, playing tag, virtual workout) | Each afternoon |

TIP: Start by selecting a behavior or skill that your child will be able to have some success with, like a skill they know how to do, but do not always do. This will allow the child to quickly earn the reward which will then hopefully increase the use of the behavior or skill.

2. Choose the rewards

Choose rewards that will be motivating to your child. These can be a variety of things such as a specific item, time to do a preferred activity, or special praise from you and/or other members of your household.



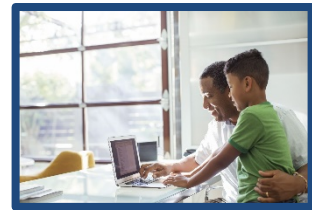
| SOCIAL | ACTIVITIES/ITEMS |
|--|----------------------|
| Tickles | Computer game |
| Hugs | Time to play outside |
| Praise (“Good job finishing homework,” “I love how you helped our sister clear the table”) | Favorite game |
| High-fives | Pokémon© cards |



| | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Clapping | Legos |
| Cheering | Drawing |
| Tight squeezes | Movie |
| | Swinging on a swing |
| | Preferred snack |
| | Tokens for token reinforcer |

TIP: For rewards that are activities/items, try to avoid using rewards that your child can use at any time.

EXAMPLE: If you have chosen “watching videos on the iPad” as a reward for finishing homework, your child may not be very motivated to complete the homework assignment if they can use the iPad at other times during the day without having to do any tasks.



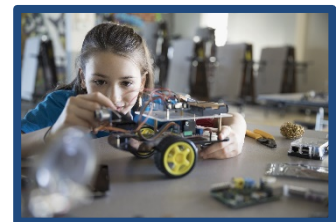
TIP: If possible, ask your child for ideas about what they would like to work for. Getting your child’s input may help with buy-in.

TIP: Have multiple rewards available. Children can get bored with having the same reward all the time.

TIP: Try to match the value of the reward to the difficulty of the task. If your child is cleaning their room, a fun activity (watching a favorite show) may be a better choice as a reward than a high five, which may not be motivating enough for a big task. A social reward, such as praise or a high five, may be a better match for smaller tasks such as putting a dish in the dishwasher or hanging up their coat.

3. Have the materials ready

Be sure to have all the materials you need before working on the target skill with your child. For positive reinforcement, have the rewards ready to give right after your child performs the skill or behavior.





For a token economy, decide what type of tokens to use and how many tokens your child will need to earn to get the final reward. Remember to have the final reward available once your child has earned a specific number of tokens.

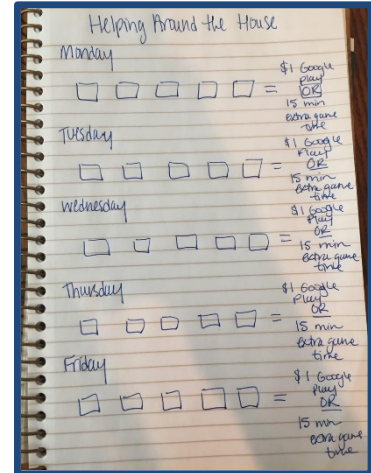
Share with your sister

★ = Pick from the surprise box

EXAMPLES OF TOKENS:

- Check marks
- Stickers
- Magnets
- Plastic chips
- Play money

TIP: Consider using a box or container for keeping rewards all in one place.



4. Explain the reinforcement system to your child

Be specific about what you want your child to do and how and when the rewards will be given. Remember to use language that your child will be able to easily understand.

TIP: It is a good idea to explain to your child why the behavior or skill is important, such as “Putting your toys away keeps the floor clear so everyone can be safe when they are walking around”.

TIP: Use written or picture reminders if you think it will be hard for your child to remember or understand your verbal directions.

5. Give reinforcement each time your child shows the desired behavior

Each time your child uses the behavior or skill, remember to give the reward.

TIP: Be consistent – if your child sees that you are not following through with the reward, then they may not be motivated do what is expected.





What are the key points to remember when using reinforcement?

1. Start small

Choose one task, activity, or behavior to focus on when starting with reinforcement. Wait until your child has shown success with that behavior before using reinforcement with other activities or tasks.

2. Be patient

Remember learning a skill or changing a behavior takes time. Once you start using reinforcement, it may take time to see the changes. Keep trying and stay consistent and you should see your child use the expected behavior more often.

3. Be positive

Try to offer the reward at the start of the task by letting your child know what they will get if they complete the task rather than what will happen if they don't complete the task. For example, saying, "We can read two books together after you put your pajamas on" focuses on the positive rather than "If you don't put your pajamas on, I am not going to read with you".

4. Avoid accidental reinforcement

Try not to reinforce your child when they display unwanted behaviors or do not complete a task. For example – if your child is whining about wanting to do something and you allow them to do it, then you have reinforced the behavior of whining. Sometimes ignoring an unwanted behavior is more effective.

5. Use social praise even if you are using other types of rewards

It is always a good idea to use social praise at the same time you are giving other rewards. You want to build some intrinsic motivation (internal desire to do what is expected) as you are working on new skills and behaviors.

6. Time to fade

Fading means providing less frequent and less powerful reinforcement over time. At the beginning, it is usually important to provide rewards often, but you should think about helping your child be more independent. As your child begins to become more independent with the task or activity, then you can begin to gradually decrease how often you give the reward. Also, try using more social praise over time.



What are common challenges when using reinforcement?

Below are examples of what you can do if reinforcement is not working exactly the way you expected.

Your child is not doing the task the way you expect, so the reward is not being earned.

- a) Your child does not know exactly how the task is to be done. You can start by doing the task together and giving praise as the child is helping you with the task.
- b) The task is too big. If you want your child to clean the room, maybe start out by giving the child specific steps. You can then reinforce the child for each of the steps. For example, instead of the task of “cleaning your room,” break it down into steps such 1. Make your bed; 2. Put all dirty clothes in the hamper; 3. Put all toys in toy box/on shelf; 4. Vacuum or sweep the floor.

For the first few days, your child was doing the task to earn the reward, but now they have stopped.

- a) Change rewards. Your child may no longer be motivated by the reward(s) being offered. Try adding new rewards. If your child can communicate, try asking them what they would like to have as a reward. If they are not able to communicate, try a reward survey by putting different items in front of them and seeing which items they like.
- b) Give choices. Giving your child a choice of rewards can help to avoid boredom. For example, after your child has washed the dishes you can say “Thank you for washing the dishes without being asked – would you like to select a family movie or play a video game for 20 minutes.” If your child has limited communication skills, you could also show them specific items (or pictures of those items) and let them choose what they would like as a reward for completing the desired task.

Your child’s behavior is not changing when you use only use social rewards such as “Great job” and “Good work.”

- a) Be specific. For spoken reinforcement to be effective, the words need to be specific to the task. For example – “Great job making up your bed. It looks very neat.” Or “I like how you shared your toy with your sister. That was very nice of you.”
- b) Pair the reinforcement. Some children need a little more than just verbal praise. You can try pairing your specific praise with a hug, high five, or time to do something special.



Your child is not willing to stop the reinforcement activity when it is time to continue working on task or start a new task.

- a) Give a clear beginning and end time to the reward. Some children need to know how long they can do an activity. For example – “After you finish your homework, you can use the iPad for 15 minutes” or “You can watch one episode of [name of TV show] after you get dress, then it is time to eat breakfast.”
- b) Use a timer. Some children need a visual or an alarm to let them know when their time is up with the reinforcement activity. You can use a timer on a cell phone or tablet or a kitchen timer to give a sound at the end of the time limit.
- c) Give a stopping point. If needed, use rewards that have a clear stopping point or allow you to share control. For example, if you are playing catch or blowing bubbles you may be involved in the activity and it can be easier to end the reward time. Or, if your child likes to put stickers on paper, you can limit the number of stickers provided for the reward. If it is a game on the iPad, try to choose a game that has a clear endpoint.