

UNM CDD/NMPED Educator Voices Podcast
Evidence Based Practices – Working with Challenging Behaviors
Extinction

Some Evidence Based Practices focus on the reduction or elimination of behaviors that interfere with a student’s ability to participate in school, home, and community settings. Extinction is a strategy based on applied behavior analysis that is used to reduce or eliminate unwanted behavior. Educators sometimes have the idea that extinction means “ignore it and it will go away.” Extinction is, however, a bit more complicated. In order to extinguish a behavior, it is essential to know what reinforcer is maintaining the behavior. For example, if the behavior is maintained (reinforced) by attention, then no longer providing attention for the behavior will eventually extinguish the behavior. If it is maintained by getting away from a task, environment or person, however, then the plan must include how not to allow that escape.

Steps in using extinction:

1. Determine what is reinforcing the behavior
 - a. Attention
 - b. Escape (getting out of something)
 - c. Tangible (getting something)
 - d. Automatic or sensory (something feels good)
2. Determine if it is safe and possible to no longer provide (or allow) the reinforcement
 - a. Extinction is not a good strategy for dangerous behaviors or for escape behaviors that may escalate to physical aggression
 - b. Extinguishing an automatically reinforced behavior is very difficult.
3. Determine if extinction is possible in the environment in which the student is placed.
 - a. Can all adults (including those not always in the classroom) abide by the request to not reinforce the behavior. (Attention, whether positive or negative, is a powerful reinforcer.)
 - b. Can the other students in the classroom learn not to reinforce the behavior.
4. Determine a replacement (an appropriate behavior that serves the same function) or incompatible (one that cannot be performed at the same time) behavior to teach and reinforce instead.
5. Be prepared for the behavior to get worse before it gets better. This is called an extinction burst.
6. Be prepared for the behavior to come back after it has been gone for awhile. This is spontaneous recovery. Continue to implement the extinction procedures.

Resource:

<https://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/sites/autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/documents/Extinction-Complete-10-2010.pdf>