

Consequence Strategies Part 1- Reinforcement

By Lauren Miles

This series is a follow up on the article about Antecedent Strategies. Consequence strategies are at the other end of the Three-Term Contingency of behavior, antecedent – behavior – consequence. Antecedents are the stimuli that come before and evoke behavior, which is the response of an individual, and the consequence is the stimulus change that follows and affects the future outcome of behavior (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). While Antecedent strategies were the proactive approach to behavior change, Consequence strategies are the reactive approach. Consequence strategies look at the variables that maintain the behavior and making changes once the behavior occurs. In order to implement Consequence strategies, one must understand the difference between reinforcement versus punishment and positive versus negative and how these terms interact. This article is a two-part series on Consequence Strategies and will focus on *reinforcement*.

What is a stimulus?

A stimulus is simply a single or combination of physical objects or events that affects behavior (Mayer, Sulzer-Azaroff, & Wallace, 2014). Stimuli might include internal events such as pain or illness and external objects or events such as the weather, the volume on the music, or the people in the room. Antecedent strategies and consequence strategies utilize stimuli to affect behavior.

What is reinforcement?

Reinforcement is a stimulus change, which follows a behavior and *maintains* or *increases* the future occurrence of that behavior (Cooper et al., 2007). Not all stimulus changes that occur after a behavior are considered reinforcement. If the stimulus change does not maintain or increase the behavior, it might simply be a reward. When the stimulus, contingent on the behavior, maintains or increase that behavior, it is a reinforcer. At [Shepherds College](#), we use the term *consequences to increase behavior* when discussing and implementing reinforcement procedures, to help us remember their purpose.

What is POSITIVE in relation to consequences?

The first thoughts many have when hearing the word positive in relation to consequences is good, earning something, a reward, or reinforcement. However,

positive in the consequence world, is simply the *addition* of stimuli after a behavior occurs. It is possible to have positive reinforcement and positive punishment.

What is NEGATIVE in relation to consequences?

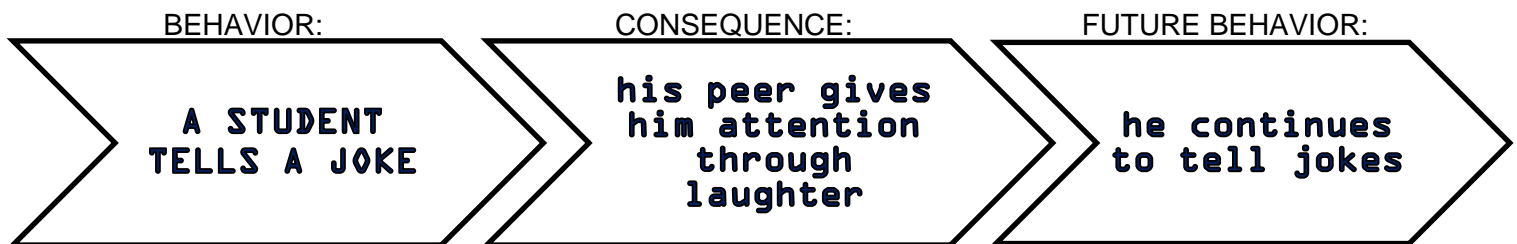
Similarly, when hearing the word negative in relation to consequences the thought is punishment, bad, or taking something away. However, negative is the opposite of positive, simply the *removal* of stimuli after a behavior occurs. Just like there is positive reinforcement and punishment, there is negative reinforcement and negative punishment.

Putting it all together with examples observed at Shepherds College:

The following chart demonstrates the relationship between positive and negative on reinforcement. The second article will fill in the rest of the chart, explaining the relationship between positive and negative on punishment.

Positive Reinforcement is the *addition* of stimuli, after a behavior occurs, to *maintain or increase* future occurrences of that behavior.

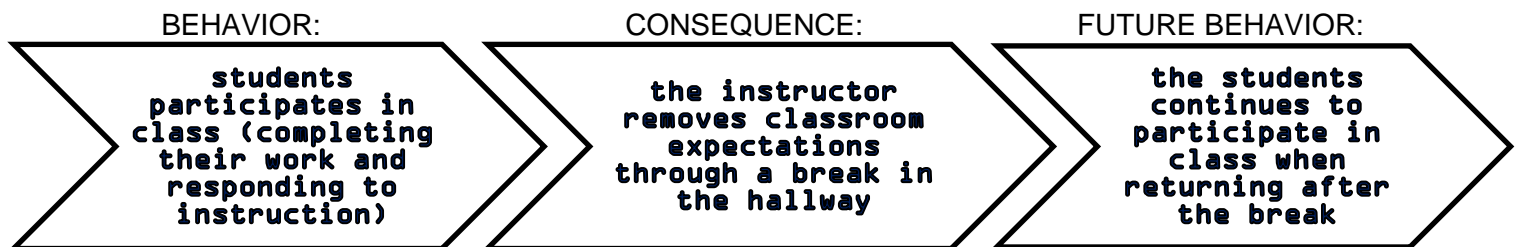
	Reinforcement	Punishment
Positive	+ Stimuli ↑ future behavior	
Negative		



A student tells a joke to his peer at lunch. After he tell the joke, his peer adds attention through laughter, to the situation. The laughter is reinforcing to the joke teller, so he tells the joke to his peers in the hallway and to his teacher when he gets to class.

Negative Reinforcement is the *removal* of stimuli, after a behavior occurs, to maintain or *increase* future occurrences of that behavior.

	Reinforcement	Punishment
Positive	+ Stimuli ↑ future behavior	
Negative	- Stimuli ↑ future behavior	



As students participate in class (completing their work and responding to instruction), the teacher removes the classroom expectations by allowing a break in the hall. The removal of the classroom expectations for a break, reinforces the students' participation and they continue to participate when they return to the classroom.

If you would like to more information on the Consequence Strategies Training Series at Shepherds College, please click here..... (insert link to previous article and forms)

References:

Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2007). *Applied behavior analysis* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Mayer, G. R., Sulzer-Azaroff, B., & Wallace, M. (2014). *Behavior analysis for lasting change* (3rd ed.). Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY: Sloan Publishing, LLC.