Strategy to Practice: Positive Reinforcement (Lesson 7b)

Please read the following scenario and then, to your best ability, answer the questions below. Use the Activity Reference at the bottom of this worksheet if needed.

Scenario
Katie is a very social three-year-old who has difficulty staying seated and quiet during group circle time in her preschool classroom. Katie often talks to her friends, interrupts the teacher, or walks around the room during group time. The teacher constantly has to give Katie verbal reminders to remain quiet or return to the group. Katie’s teacher wants to use positive reinforcement to help Katie stay quiet and in her seat during group time. The teacher knows that Katie loves playing on the computer and painting pictures. She also enjoys doing activities with friends and taking on leadership roles.

Questions
Imagine that you are a paraprofessional in Katie’s classroom. The teacher asks you to help her implement some type of positive reinforcement to promote Katie’s appropriate behavior during group time. Based on what you learned in the lesson, answer the following questions about this scenario.

1. What challenging behavior does Katie engage in and when does it occur?

2. Describe the teacher’s desirable appropriate behavior for Katie.
EC-S1: Ability to deliver developmentally appropriate instructional interventions under the direction of a licensed professional for infants and young children ages 0-5 in these domains: cognitive, motor, self-help, sensory, social/play, and speech/language development.

EC-S3: Ability to prepare, adapt, and use developmentally appropriate materials under the direction of a licensed professional.

3. There are several different types of positive reinforcement that could be used to reinforce Katie’s appropriate behavior. List at least two activity reinforcers that could be used in this situation.

4. List at least two tangible reinforcers that could be used in this situation.

5. List at least two social reinforcers that could be used in this situation.
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EC-S3: Ability to prepare, adapt, and use developmentally appropriate materials under the direction of a licensed professional.

6. What type of reinforcement would you use to reinforce Katie’s appropriate behavior? This could be one of the reinforcers that you already listed or a combination of reinforcers.

7. Why would you choose those reinforcers in this situation?

8. When would you provide Katie with the reinforcement?
EC-S1: Ability to deliver developmentally appropriate instructional interventions under the direction of a licensed professional for infants and young children ages 0-5 in these domains: cognitive, motor, self-help, sensory, social/play, and speech/language development.

EC-S3: Ability to prepare, adapt, and use developmentally appropriate materials under the direction of a licensed professional.

Activity Reference: Types of Reinforcers

**Natural and Direct Reinforcement**
Natural and direct reinforcement is reinforcement that occurs naturally and directly from the behavior. For example, interacting appropriately with peers in group activities will lead to more invitations to join such activities. The natural reinforcement for appropriate requests for attention, help, participation, etc. is providing the attention, help, and opportunity to participate. *When using reinforcement to address challenging behavior, the goal should always be to move the student to natural and direct reinforcement.*

**Social Reinforcers**
These are reinforcers that are socially mediated by teachers, parents, other adults, and peers, who express approval and praise for appropriate behavior. Comments (e.g., "Good job," "I can tell you are working really hard," "You're nice"), written approval (e.g., "Super"), and expressions of approval (e.g., nodding your head, smiling, clapping, a pat on the back) are all very effective reinforcers.

**Activity Reinforcers**
Activity reinforcers are very effective and positive for children. Allowing children to participate in preferred activities (e.g., games, computer time, etc.) is very powerful, especially if part of the reinforcement is being allowed to choose a classmate with whom to participate in the activity. This also provides social reinforcement from the partner.

**Tangible Reinforcers**
This category includes edibles, toys, stickers, and awards. Edibles and toys should be used with caution. Parents may have reason to object to edibles as reinforcement (e.g., if a student has a weight problem), and toys can cause envy in other students. However, awards can be in the form of certificates, displaying work, and letters home to parents commending the students' progress. These are powerfully motivating reinforcers.

**Guidelines for Using Reinforcers**

Reinforcers must be valued, preferred, and individualized. What may be extremely motivating for one child may be entirely useless for another. In order to make positive reinforcement work as an effective intervention, use the following guidelines:

1. **Reinforcement must be consistently delivered**, according to a planned reinforcement schedule. If it is not according to a planned schedule, the child will develop no connection between appropriate behavior and the reinforcement, and the appropriate behavior will not be reinforced.
2. **Reinforcement must be delivered immediately.** Children should know when they can expect reinforcement. If you wait until the end of the day to reinforce a child for remaining seated during circle time, the effect of reinforcement is reduced, if not lost. If it is impossible to deliver reinforcement immediately, verbal reinforcement should be given, and the child should be told when he or she can expect to receive other reinforcement. In this way, a contingency between behavior and reinforcement will be strengthened or maintained.

3. **Improvement should be reinforced.** Do not wait until the child's behavior is perfect to deliver reinforcement. You should recognize improvement, and let the child know that you recognize the effort.

4. **Do not give reinforcement because you feel sorry for a child.** If a child does not achieve the required criterion, delivering reinforcement will only teach the child that rewards are readily available regardless of behavior and may even lead to an escalation of the behavior. Rather, recognize that you know the child is disappointed but that they will have the opportunity to try again tomorrow. **Reinforcement must be contingent on behavior.**

5. **Whenever possible, pair any reinforcement with social reinforcement.** If your reinforcement plan is letting children participate in preferred activities, make sure to give some sort of social reinforcement, such as telling the children, "You did a great job today. You should be really proud of yourself," or letting the children participate in their chosen activities with a friend.

6. **Make sure that social reinforcers are not ambiguous.** They should be sincere, clear, and identify the specific behavior for which they are being delivered.

7. **Reinforcement should be age-appropriate.**

8. Finally, in designing a positive reinforcement plan, it is very important to **move from less natural reinforcement (tangibles) to more natural reinforcement** (social reinforcement, and/or reinforcement that occurs naturally and directly from behavior.)