



How can I get behaviors I would like to see from my child?

Whether you are a proponent of nature or nurture, there is no doubt that we are shaped by our environments, events, and people in them. Positive and negative behaviors are fostered by our environments most of the time without us being aware of those influences. However, learned behaviors can be “unlearned”.

To understand these concepts one needs to understand that a positive reinforcer is an event that, when presented immediately following a behavior, causes the behavior to increase in frequency, the term positive reinforcer is roughly similar to the word reward.

Paired with the concept of positive reinforcer, the principle called **positive reinforcement** states that if, in a given situation, somebody does something that is followed immediately by a positive reinforcer, that person is more likely to do the same thing again when he or she next encounters a similar situation.

One example might be:

- A mom is folding the laundry and her son begins whining and attempting to get her attention. (At this point, how and when reinforcers are initiated can result in the rewarding of behaviors a parent may or may not want to see). If mom stops her task to engage with the child, either to play with or chastise the child, mom is increasing the likelihood that child will repeat that behavior, as the attention given is the immediate reward. If mom ignores the whining child, sees the child, and then engages in reading a book (taking time out of laundry folding to sit and read with child), she has then just reinforced the likelihood the child will engage in reading rather than whining. Despite its simplicity, it is a valid interaction.

Every time we do something, no matter what it is, there are consequences that reward us or punish us, or don't affect us one way or another.

Behavior modification procedures involve changing a person's environment. In altering the environment with the intent of modifying behavior, one has to be aware of what motivates the individual and how to be effective with positive reinforcers. You can then begin to introduce them into a scenario and monitor the changes towards desired behaviors.

Bob O'Connor, MS
Director of Intake

To submit questions to our experts on behavioral health, please e-mail: northstarinfo@uhsinc.com

For more information, please call our Intake Department 258-7575 or toll free in Alaska, 800-478-7575