



Pairing

- Stimulus stimulus pairing is a process by which a neutral stimulus (person, place, activity, or object) becomes a conditioned reinforcer.
- Pairing is important because it teaches the child to associate his/her therapists, therapy area and therapy materials with good things.
- It is important for the child to want to be around his/her therapists in order to learn from them!

How to Pair

- Identify as many reinforcers as possible
- Have a large supply and wide variety of reinforcing items to give the child
- Approach the child and deliver reinforcement non-contingently. You should give the child things that he/she likes for "free." The child does not need to request or "earn" the reinforcers in anyway
 - Maximize the number of times that you provide reinforcement.
- Break edible reinforcers into small pieces so you can hand them to the child more frequently.
- Deliver multiple reinforcers at once (TV, food, toys, sensory stimulation, etc.)
- Try to deliver reinforcers several times per minute.
- Talk to the child, but do not expect him or her to talk back.
- Follow the child's changing interests. If the child becomes bored with a reinforcer, find another reinforcer.
- Actively manipulate the environment and interact with the child so that you are required for maximum enjoyment of the activity.
- Examples:
 - Child is on swing - therapist pushes
 - Child is thirsty – therapist fills cup with a tiny bit at a time
 - Child wants to go outside – therapist unlocks door





Pairing the Environment

- Pair across settings
- Pair across stimuli
- Pair across activities
- Pair across persons

Common Pairing Mistakes

- Placing demands on the child
 - Resist the urge to try to “teach”the child by asking questions or making the child “work”for reinforcers
 - It is necessary to first build rapport with the child before teaching
 - Pairing may feel slow, but you should not rush through it. Time spent pairing is well spent.
- Lack of active interaction with the child.
 - Pairing is an active process on the part of the therapist
 - The therapist must constantly be giving reinforcers to the child
 - Pairing will not be effective if the therapist just sits in the room while the child does his/her own thing
 - The therapist must continually act as the “giver” and the child should function as the taker.
- Infrequent or weak reinforcement.
 - If strong reinforcers are not given frequently, the pairing will be less effective
 - Find as many opportunities to reinforce the child as possible (several per minute)

Determining if Pairing Has Been Effective

- Questions to ask:
 - Does the child approach you readily?
 - Does the child follow you when you leave the room?
- Once the child is frequently and willingly approaching you to obtain reinforcement, you are ready to begin teaching verbal behavior in the natural environment.

