
EDIBLE REINFORCEMENT

WHAT IS EDIBLE REINFORCEMENT

Edible reinforcement is the use of food as a reinforcer. Many children are extremely motivated by food, and this can be used as excellent motivation during session. Edible reinforcement is especially helpful when working with lesser preferred programs such as flashcards. There are some factors to consider before bringing edibles to a session:

- Food Allergies
 - Makes sure to check with the family before ever giving food or beverages to your client. Food allergies are extremely serious. Even if you have seen the family give a client a certain food, you cannot be certain that this edible is not accommodating an allergy of which you are not aware.
 - If your client does have food allergies and you and your BCBA have decided to use edibles, the parents may be able to provide or give permission for buying certain edibles they know will be reinforcing and safe.
- Does the Family or School have Restrictions on Food?
 - If you are working within a family or school that has set rules and restrictions about when and where food can be consumed, you will want to check that the edibles you want to use are appropriate for the session.
- Fading Edible Reinforcement
 - Fading edible reinforcement can be very difficult. Edible reinforcement is often used when other types of reinforcement are not working. Make sure that you have tried other reinforcement options and have discussed using edible reinforcement with your BCBA.
 - In conjunction with using edible reinforcement, it can be helpful to use other types of reinforcement. This can be helpful for fading. For example, every three correct answers the client can have an edible reinforcement, but each correct answer receives tickles.
- Keep Reinforcement Consistent
 - When using edible reinforcement, it is important to use it consistently. If a child received a cookie for completing five minutes of work, the client should be reinforced the same way each time. If the child starts having inconsistent reinforcement, this may be confusing to the child and the reinforcement will become less affective.
 - Let the child know how they earn the reinforcement before the start of the trial!

CONDUCTING A PREFERENCE ASSESSMENT

Preference Assessments are used to create a preference hierarchy (list of rank from greatest to least) from a group. Oftentimes, before using edible reinforcement within a session, a preference assessment will occur to help identify which edible reinforcers will be the most motivating to your client. Preference Assessments are conducted by your BCBA but can be done during your sessions with your assistance. There are several different types of preference assessments, feel free to ask your BCBA for more information regarding which type would be best for your clients needs.








WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF EDIBLE REINFORCERS?

Edible reinforcers are different from child to child. Some children will enjoy all edibles given to them and others might be much pickier. Discussing what is reinforcing with the parents can be a great first step to identifying motivating edible reinforcement.

Edible reinforcement does not need to be unhealthy. Many children are reinforced by different beverages such as juice and milk or sweet and crunchy foods such as strawberries or celery with peanut butter. Therefore, preference assessments are important.

Keeping edible reinforcement small is an effective way to keep the child from becoming too full for the reinforcement to be effective and from the child no longer being motivated by it due to overuse. Many times, with edible reinforcement, preference assessments must be conducted often as the child will not be consistently reinforced by the same foods or beverages. Below is a list of common edible reinforcers:

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| Fruits and Vegetables |  | Strawberries, Apples, Bananas, Pineapple, Blueberries, Mango, Avocado, Peaches, Pears, Celery, Peas, Carrots, etc. |
| Crackers |  | Goldfish crackers, Ritz crackers, Chicken in a Biskit, Wheat Thins, Triscuits, etc. |
| Candy |  | Skittles, M&Ms, Gummy Bears/Worms, Lollipops, Jellybeans, Candy Corn, Pop Rocks, Licorice, etc. |
| Chips |  | Doritos, Cheetos, Tortilla Chips, Lays, Pringles, etc. |
| Beverages |  | Milk, Orange Juice, Gatorade, Apple Juice, Soda, Kool-Aide, Tea, etc. |