

What Is It?

Noncontingent reinforcement is a strategy where the teacher delivers ongoing, brief reinforcement to a student independent of the student's behavior. The reinforcement is provided to the student so that the problem behavior becomes unnecessary.

When to Use It

- Noncontingent reinforcement is most effective when the function of behavior is to gain attention.
- Noncontingent reinforcement does not teach or reinforce alternative behaviors. Therefore, it should be used with other behavioral strategies that teach appropriate skills.
- Noncontingent reinforcement should be used anytime the teacher can deliver brief reinforcement to the student during instruction.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

	1. Select a reinforcer that serves the same function as the problem behavior. For example, if the function is to gain attention from the teacher, the teacher should provide the student with access to attention.
	2. Determine how often you will provide the reinforcer (i.e., the schedule of reinforcement). Take student data to determine the shortest period of time the student will engage in an activity appropriately before demonstrating the challenging behavior. Set the intervals of reinforcement slightly below this period of time.
	3. Using the schedule of reinforcement, deliver reinforcement at the end of each interval throughout the duration of an activity. Reinforcement should be delivered regardless of the student's behavior at the end of the interval.
	4. During implementation, ignore the occurrence of the challenging behavior.
	5. As the challenging behaviors decrease, gradually increase the time between each reinforcer (i.e., schedule of reinforcement).

Example

Sabrina frequently puts her head down on her desk and cries during group instruction. The intervention team conducts a functional behavior assessment and determines the function of this behavior is access to adult attention. The intervention team decides to implement noncontingent reinforcement procedures to decrease the crying during group reading instruction in Mr. Smith's class. Mr. Smith collects baseline data and determines that Sabrina puts her head down and cries approximately two times in a 30-minute session. They set the intervals for reinforcement at 15-minutes. Every 15-minutes Mr. Smith checks-in with Sabrina and provides her with direct attention, based on what is reinforcing for her. Sometimes he gives her a compliment, other times he asks her how she's doing or feeling. These interactions are brief, but they provide Sabrina with noncontingent access to attention during group instruction and reduces her desire to gain attention by crying.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- During implementation, ignore occurrences of the problem behavior (i.e., put the problem behavior on extinction).
- Use something that cues you to deliver the reinforcement at the correct time interval (e.g., a vibrating alarm on a cell phone or a timer). Deliver the reinforcement on time.
- During implementation, intervals can be various times as long as the average of the intervals is about equal to the time that was originally determined to be effective. However, be careful not to make intervals too long or too short.
- After the student has been successful in the activity, increase the length of the interval gradually. If the intervention no longer reduces the problem behavior following an increase in the interval, revert to the last successful interval duration.
- If a problem behavior occurs during the interval, ignore the problem behavior.
- If a problem behavior occurs at the end of the interval and it is time to deliver the reinforcement, wait a short time to deliver reinforcement so you do not inadvertently reinforce the challenging behavior. Many teachers wait approximately one minute.

Resources

Flaute, A. J., Peterson, S. M., Van Norman, R. K., Riffle, T., & Eakins, A. (2005). Motivate me! 20 tips for using a MotivAider® for improving your classroom. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 2(2) Article 3. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ966535.pdf>

Tucker, M., Sigafos, J., & Bushell, H. (1998). Use of noncontingent reinforcement in the treatment of challenging behavior: A review and clinical guide. *Behavior Modification*, 22, 529-547.