

## Guidelines for Using Extinction for Challenging Behaviors

### DEFINITION & GOAL

- Extinction is a consequent procedure that involves withholding of reinforcement for a target behavior. Over time, behaviors that are undergoing extinction will be less likely to continue in the future.
- When using extinction for a challenging behavior, it is likely that the behavior will worsen before it gets better. This is referred to as an extinction burst and occurs most often immediately after the extinction procedure is introduced.
- The decision to use extinction is a team decision and is not appropriate for some behaviors (see considerations for using extinction below).

### PREPARING TO USE EXTINCTION

<b>1</b>	Since the extinction procedure for challenging behaviors involves withholding the reinforcer(s) for those behaviors, the team must know the function(s) of the challenging behaviors as identified through a functional behavior assessment (FBA).
<b>2</b>	The extinction procedure is most effective when combined with reinforcement of replacement behaviors (e.g., functional communication) or providing reinforcement on a time-based schedule, independent of the student's behavior (i.e., noncontingent reinforcement). Token reinforcement systems can be used to acknowledge when students are engaging in replacement behaviors.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE USE OF EXTINCTION

<b>1</b>	<p>Extinction does not teach a new behavior. It is recommended to pair the extinction procedure with the teaching of a replacement behavior. When selecting replacement behaviors, consider the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the replacement behavior function-based? Does it result in the same outcome that challenging behavior did?            Note: Teaching a student to request a break from work to escape from the activity is an example of a function-based behavior.</li> <li>Is the replacement behavior easier to perform than the challenging behavior?</li> <li>Is the replacement behavior easily teachable to the student?</li> <li>Are staff willing and able to reinforce the replacement behavior?</li> </ol>
<b>2</b>	<p>In addition to teaching and reinforcing a replacement behavior, teams may want to reinforce a desired (long-term) behavior.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the behavior you would like the student to do in the future?            Note: Teaching a student to complete some or all their work before requesting a break is an example of a desired behavior.</li> </ol>
<b>3</b>	Consistent implementation is key! Information about the plan should be shared with individuals working with the student. As part of the extinction plan, a note could be placed on the classroom door advising visitors to speak with the teacher prior to interacting with students. This enables the teacher to convey the relevant information and maintain fidelity of the extinction plan.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE USE OF EXTINCTION (CONT.)

<b>4</b>	It is important to make the replacement behavior a more reliable and efficient way to access the reinforcer than the challenging behavior. Scheduling additional teaching sessions for the replacement behavior is one way to boost opportunities for reinforcement of this behavior.
<b>5</b>	Extinction should not be used when: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Behaviors are extreme or have the potential to harm the student or others.</li> <li>b. Teams are unable to manage extinction bursts.</li> <li>c. Teams are not willing or are unable to consistently withhold reinforcement. Inconsistent withholding of the reinforcer results in occasional reinforcement of the target behavior. Behaviors that are occasionally reinforced are harder to extinguish.</li> </ol>
<b>6</b>	Some behaviors (e.g., pacing, stimming, vocalizations) help students self-regulate their behavior and prevent other challenging behaviors. The use of extinction may not be appropriate for behaviors that do not pose a safety risk and do not impede the students learning or the learning of others.

## Materials for Using Extinction

Data sheet, timer, potential reinforcers (always reinforce replacement or other desired behaviors!)

## EXTINCTION GENERAL PROCEDURES

<b>1</b>	Once the behavioral function(s) have been identified, collect baseline data on the challenging behavior. Information about the frequency, duration, and intensity of the challenging behavior prior to implementing extinction and reinforcement-based interventions is important to gather so that assessment of the intervention's impact can be made.
<b>2</b>	Develop an extinction plan for the challenging behavior. It is important to note that extinction procedures look different across behaviors depending on the function(s) of behavior. It is also important to develop a plan for extinction bursts that include what to do if the student's behavior becomes unsafe or begins to impact other students in harmful ways.
<b>3</b>	Implement extinction procedures (see below for more details).
<b>4</b>	Collect intervention data and review progress. Observing an initial elevation in the challenging behavior (i.e., extinction burst) is common. Gradually, the challenging behavior should show a decrease to minimal or zero levels. If the behavior remains high, reassess the fidelity of the intervention and determine whether intervention components need to be added, modified, or removed.

### **EXTINCTION PROCEDURES (ATTENTION FUNCTION EXAMPLE)**

1. During circle time, the student engages in the challenging behavior of picking at a taped boundary on the floor. The teacher ignores the behavior and does not provide verbal responses or physical attention (e.g., hand on the shoulder). Other types of attention like moving closer in proximity or changing facial expressions should also be withheld from that behavior.
2. Remain aware of the student's behavior and provide reinforcement immediately when the student uses a replacement or desired behavior, such as placing hands in lap manipulating a fidget, or raising a hand to speak

### **EXTINCTION PROCEDURES (ESCAPE FUNCTION EXAMPLE)**

Students may use challenging behaviors to avoid/escape work tasks, routine expectations (e.g., eating in the cafeteria), following classroom rules, and non-preferred or aversive activities.

1. The student drops to the floor to avoid/escape a non-preferred math task. The teacher does not allow the student to escape the task by continuing to present the demand or repeat the instructions. Instead of verbally responding (e.g., reprimand, discussion of the behavior) to the challenging behavior the teacher tells the student what to do (e.g., "trace the letter A").
2. The student is pacing back and forth in front of the cafeteria doors, attempting to return to the classroom. The teacher stands in front of the door and prohibits the student from leaving. The teacher withholds attention for pacing and reminds the student of the expectation to sit at the table. Sitting at the table (desired behavior) results in verbal praise and token reinforcement, asking to leave the cafeteria (replacement behavior) results in leaving the cafeteria immediately after the request.

### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESCAPE FROM WORK:**

- Antecedent interventions, such as noncontingent reinforcement, providing choices, varying task materials, and modifying instructions should be considered. If the student's motivation to escape from work can be lessened by altering antecedents of the work task, the need for escape extinction may be eliminated.
- In addition to reinforcing appropriate communication, differential reinforcement of task compliance should be considered.

### **EXTINCTION PROCEDURES (TANGIBLE FUNCTION-ACCESS TO PREFERRED ITEMS EXAMPLE)**

During snack, a student screams after eating all the crackers in their bowl. The teacher waits until the student is calm (stops screaming) and provides a choice of crackers or popcorn. When the student appropriately makes a choice or requests the item, the teacher provides the desired snack.

## EXTINCTION PROCEDURES FOR AUTOMATICALLY REINFORCED BEHAVIORS (SENSORY EXTINCTION EXAMPLE)

When reinforcement occurs as the direct result of a challenging behavior and is not easily influenced by the social environment, this is known as automatic reinforcement. A student who repetitively bangs a bowl against a table to hear the sound it makes may be experiencing automatic reinforcement.

1. To implement sensory extinction, the likely source of the reinforcement is blocked. In the example above, a teacher may affix a towel or other fabric to the table to mask the auditory sensation that is thought to provide automatic reinforcement. In sensory extinction, the behavior is allowed to occur, but the reinforcing effects of the behavior (e.g., sound, feel, etc.) are blocked.
2. As with extinction procedures for the social functions, it remains important to focus on skill-building. In many cases, a student's interest in repetitive or stereotypical actions with items and materials can be, in part, explained by a lack of knowledge or interest in exploring and engaging with materials functionally. Teaching students play or leisure skills can increase their repertoire of appropriate behaviors and may compete with the motivation to engage in non-functional actions.
3. Differential reinforcement procedures (DRO, DRI) for automatically reinforced behaviors should also be considered.

### EXAMPLES OF THE EXTINCTION PROCEDURE BY FUNCTION

ATTENTION	ESCAPE	TANGIBLE	AUTOMATIC
<p>Use planned ignoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue with the activity and minimize attention for challenging behavior</li> <li>• If safety is not a concern, it is okay to walk away (while maintaining awareness of the student).</li> <li>• If safety is a concern, clear the environment of potentially harmful objects and remove other students from the area.</li> </ul>	<p>Prevent escape from the aversive item/activity or setting following the target challenging behavior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat task instructions</li> <li>• Re-present work materials</li> <li>• Break down task requirements into smaller steps</li> </ul>	<p>Withhold the items, materials, or activities following the target challenging behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain possession of desired items</li> <li>• Ensure sensory properties (e.g., flashing lights, music) are turned off so access is completely denied</li> </ul>	<p>Mask, reduce or block the behavior's reinforcing properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place a towel or other fabric over a surface to reduce the auditory stimulation resulting from the behavior</li> <li>• Remove the lightbulb to prevent the visual stimulation of a lamp turned on and off repetitively</li> </ul>