Module: Differential Reinforcement of Other Behaviors

Overview of Differential Reinforcement of Other Behaviors


Differential reinforcement of other behaviors means that reinforcement is provided for desired behaviors, while inappropriate behaviors are ignored. Reinforcement can be provided: (a) when the learner is not engaging in the interfering behavior, (b) when the learner is engaging in a specific desired behavior other than the inappropriate behavior, or (c) when the learner is engaging in a behavior that is physically impossible to do while exhibiting the inappropriate behavior. Differential reinforcement (DR) is a special application of reinforcement designed to reduce the occurrence of interfering behaviors (e.g., tantrums, aggression, self-injury, stereotypic behavior). The rationale for DR is that by reinforcing behaviors that are more functional than the interfering behavior or that are incompatible with the interfering behavior, the functional behavior will increase, and the interfering behavior will decrease.

Evidence

Differential reinforcement of other behaviors meets the criteria for an evidence-based practice with six single-subject design studies.

With what ages is differential reinforcement effective?

Differential reinforcement is effective for a range of learners. The evidence base supports the use of differential reinforcement for children from ages four to twelve. In middle school settings, differential reinforcement may be integrated into self-management plans.

What skills or intervention goals can be addressed with differential reinforcement?

Differential reinforcement procedures are most commonly used to reduce challenging or interfering behaviors as well as to increase pro-social or desired behaviors. Within the articles that comprise the evidence base, differential reinforcement has been shown to be effective in reducing interfering behaviors and to increase communication/language skills.

Where has differential reinforcement been effectively used?

Differential reinforcement can be used in a variety of settings. For example, differential reinforcement can be used effectively in both classroom and home environments. Educators working with learners can use differential reinforcement as part of a self-management system or as part of an educator directed behavior plan.
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Evidence Base

The studies cited in this section document that this practice meets the NPDC on ASD’s criteria for an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist that were not included.

Preschool


Elementary and Middle School


Selected Additional References


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