

LADC Behavior Update



Shaping Behavior

Learn how to shape your child's behavior through small successes.

Prompting when Learning New Behaviors.

Learn the three steps to prompting when your child is learning new behaviors.



Shaping is the process of teaching your child new behaviors by reinforcing small steps toward the desired behavior.

Shaping Your Child's Behavior

Is your child not able to do a behavior that you would like them to do? Or maybe they can do it but they only do part of the complex behavior? Or it is possible that they can do the entire behavior but they just don't do it frequently or consistently! If any of those sound familiar (one of those should pretty much apply to every child) then shaping is the right technique for you! Shaping is the process of teaching your child new behaviors by reinforcing small steps toward the desired behavior. Shaping breaks up a complex behavior or chores into smaller steps and then you provide reinforcement for those smaller steps towards the end desired behavior. As mentioned above, shaping works for brand new behaviors, partially learned behaviors, or already learned behaviors that are not completed with consistency.

You may have learned previously how important reinforcement is to increase your child's positive behaviors. It is difficult to provide reinforcement though, if the desired behavior never happens. For this reason, we use shaping to help reinforce the child's successive approximations of the behavior. Responses are reinforced when they either resemble the final response or they include components of that final response while gradually achieving the final desired behavior. Often the reason why behavioral reinforcement programs are not working is because the parents are requiring too much before providing reinforcement.

Shaping is used all the time and we may not be aware! Shaping is used to teach animals to do new tricks! Do you think a lion at the circus just automatically jumps through a burning hoop when asked the first time or was the behavior shaped overtime with reinforcement? You might have even used shaping yourself before! Did your baby start saying mommy and daddy right away or did you first provide reinforcement (smiles, hugs, attention) when your child first said ma or da-da? Then as they progressively got closer and closer to saying mommy and daddy you kept changing the targeted sounds that got reinforcement! Another example is that usually children learn to crawl before they learn to walk so the walking behavior is shaped over time.

Shaping is kind of like the game of “hot and cold”. In that game, you reward your child for any steps closer to the prize and not reinforce movements away from the prize. So, if something is hidden in the refrigerator, you are reinforcing any movements in the direction of the refrigerator by yelling “hotter” and removing reinforcement for any movements away from the refrigerator by yelling “colder”.

Guidelines for Shaping

1. Define the beginning behavior (BB) and the goal behavior (GB):
 - a. BB = Puts away 1 toy (even if not in the correct place)
 - b. GB = Cleans up all of his toys and puts in the correct places
2. Reinforce the beginning behavior until it occurs consistently.
3. Slowly increase the requirement for the child to receive reinforcement.
 - a. Once your child has been consistently putting away 1 toy, then add another requirement to receive reinforcement. Now your child must put the 1 toy away in the correct location. Then you can add on the requirement of putting two toys away.
4. If the behavior is not equal to or better than the previous attempts, then do not reinforce it:
 - a. If you have already increased the requirement for reinforcement to place the 1 toy in the correct location, do not provide any reinforcement for the previous target (e.g. just putting away the 1 toy without the correct location)
5. The reinforcement should be consistently given after the behavior occurs.

Steps for Shaping

1. Select the target behavior.
2. Select the initial behavior that your child currently performs and that resembles the target behavior in some way.
3. Select powerful rewards with which to reinforce the initial behavior, the small steps toward the target behavior, and the target behavior.
4. Reward the initial behavior until it occurs frequently.
5. Reward successive approximations of the target behavior each time they occur.
6. Reward the target behavior each time it occurs.
7. Reinforce the target behavior on a random schedule of reinforcement once it has been performed consistently.

Prompting for Appropriate Behavior

Sometimes as you are shaping the behaviors, you will find that your child may not always comply right away or maybe they still can't physically do the behavior independently yet. That is when this prompting sequence will be useful.

Tell

This first step is to give your child a verbal prompt. Tell them what you would like them to do. In other words, give them an instruction or command. If they don't comply within 5-10 seconds, move on to the second level of prompting. If they do comply, give them lots of reinforcement!

Show

The next prompt is to show them what to do or model for them while repeating the instruction or demand. You could say, "clean up the toys like this!" while you model putting away a few toys. If your child complies, provide reinforcement but to a lesser degree than if they complied after the first prompt! If they do not comply within 5-10 seconds, then move on to the next level of prompting.

Do

The final prompt is to help them physically complete the requested behavior while you repeat the demand verbally. For example, go over to your child and physically help them clean up the toys with minimal language and eye contact. Do not stop providing physical assistance until the task is completed. Do not provide praise when the task is done.

