

TREATING SEVERE BEHAVIORS MAINTAINED BY AUTOMATIC REINFORCEMENT

When treating or modifying any behavior, the function must first be assessed. In other words, it is imperative to understand why a behavior is occurring. The most common functions are attention, escape/avoidance or gain access to items. However, there is also a function known as automatic reinforcement.

To determine if a behavior is maintained by automatic reinforcement, simply assess if the behavior occurs while no one is around. If so, then you have your answer. In the absence of social mediation, one can assume a target behavior is maintained by automatic reinforcement. This is typically the case

for self-injurious behavior, hand-flapping, toe-walking, body rocking, PICA, etc.

So, how does one address such behaviors? Well, behaviors maintained by automatic reinforcement are usually the hardest to modify. This is because the reinforcement received is instant. You want to start with finding a competing reinforcer. Is there anything that is desired or enjoyed more than the problem behavior? You can give the individual access to the reinforcer on a timed schedule regardless if the behavior occurs or not. This is known as non-contingent reinforcement. Sensory-related items can also be used as a replacement behavior. For instance, a replacement for PICA behavior could be the use of a chewy or chewing gum. In addition, contingent upon problem behavior, block and provide replacement. Sometimes reinforcement alone is not suffice. A punishment procedure known as "response cost" may be warranted. Think of it like a fine. If problem behavior occurs, the child loses access to a reinforcer for a short period of time. If there is a high-risk behavior you would like to modify, contact your local Board Certified Behavior Analyst.



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ANGELS WITH WINGS: UNITED HOMECARE'S OLDER ADULT VOLUNTEER COMPANIONSHIP PROGRAM

Volunteers make a world of difference in the lives of homebound older adults and particularly for those who live alone where depression and loneliness are constant companions. Charitable community organizations are a silver lining for older adults and their family caregivers providing programs and services that help them to age in place with dignity so they can remain living at home for as long as possible. Many people do not realize that volunteer services are also offered. Volunteers are our allies in caring. All it takes is the desire to give your time for just a few hours each week or any time you can contribute to visit a homebound older adult to help alleviate loneliness, depression, and social isolation, or provide family caregivers who are so overwhelmed they can barely find time for themselves with much needed respite and peace of mind. Angels with Wings is a program offered by United HomeCare that links volunteers and clients with the goal to provide older adults with companionship by engaging them in friendly

conversation; playing board games; surfing the net (yes, older adults can be techy too) and teaching them to use the computer; listening to music or playing musical instruments; writing letters; reading books; arts and crafts; or engaging in good old fashioned conversation to liven their spirits, remind them that they are important, that they are not forgotten, that they are not too old to participate, and that they are loved and respected. I invite you to join United HomeCare's Angels with Wings Older Adult Volunteer Companionship Program for a rewarding experience. United HomeCare provides volunteer training, orientation, and support. Be an Angel, join and make a world of difference in an older adult's life by contributing your time, talent, and caring. For more information, please call 305.716.0793 or 305.716.0710.



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