Expanding Reinforcer Repertoire
/Stimulus Stimulus Pairing

Objective
To increase the number of toys and activities a learner will play with.

Candidates for this Program
All learners

Materials
Preferred and non-preferred items and/or activities.

Preferred items can include food items, toys etc., anything that your learner already enjoys

You also will need other toys or activities that you want the student to start to play with. You can condition many different types of items/activities such as music, books and people’s voices.

Procedure

1. Do a preference assessment to determine reinforcing items, food and activities that will be used to reinforce correct responses.

2. Identify a new activity or tangible item that you want to establish as a reinforcer. Choose items that are similar to already existing reinforcers. For example of your learner likes to play with balls, try expanding to a marble maze.

3. Begin by playing with the item you want to pair. Think about the student and try to incorporate their interests into the activity to increase their motivation to get involved with the item/activity.

4. If the student is attending to the toy/activity deliver an edible and positive verbal comment about the student holding/looking at/playing with the item. For example, if you are pairing books, deliver a small edible while the learner is engaged in looking at the book and say something like “Wow, I like how you are reading!” As long as the student is looking at or attending to the item, reinforcement can be delivered about every 5 seconds. Use edibles to pair the new item or activity at first and then you can fade edibles to praise.

4. Provide the learner with the opportunity to touch/hold/play with the toy or engage in the activity. This means that you will pause after delivery of reinforcement and watch the student.

5. If the student is looking away or is talking about irrelevant issues, then re-direct the learner back to the toy/activity. Once they are re-engaged continue to deliver reinforcement.

6. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

7. Once you think the student might independently engage in the activity, you can test this hypothesis by putting the item/toy in a room with other toys. Let the student have free access to all the toys and see if they begin to engage with the activity that you were trying to pair. If the student engages with the toy/activity for a prolonged period of time, the conditioning was successful. Another way to know if you have successfully paired the item is if the student begins to independently ask for the toy/activity.

Remember
If your student begins requesting or manding for the item that you are delivering as a reinforcer for pairing purposes, do not deliver it. For example, if you want your student to engage in coloring and you are using popcorn as reinforcement, and the student begins to ask for the popcorn, do not give them popcorn. This will only pair the behavior of asking for popcorn and not the behavior of coloring. If this happens just continue to redirect them back to the activity by saying “coloring...” Or “color” over and over again. Once they are looking at the coloring book, begin to re-deliver edibles and praise.