

Perspectives on Demand Avoidance: Is it PDA, or something else?

*A two-day virtual conference hosted by POPARD,
in collaboration with ACT*

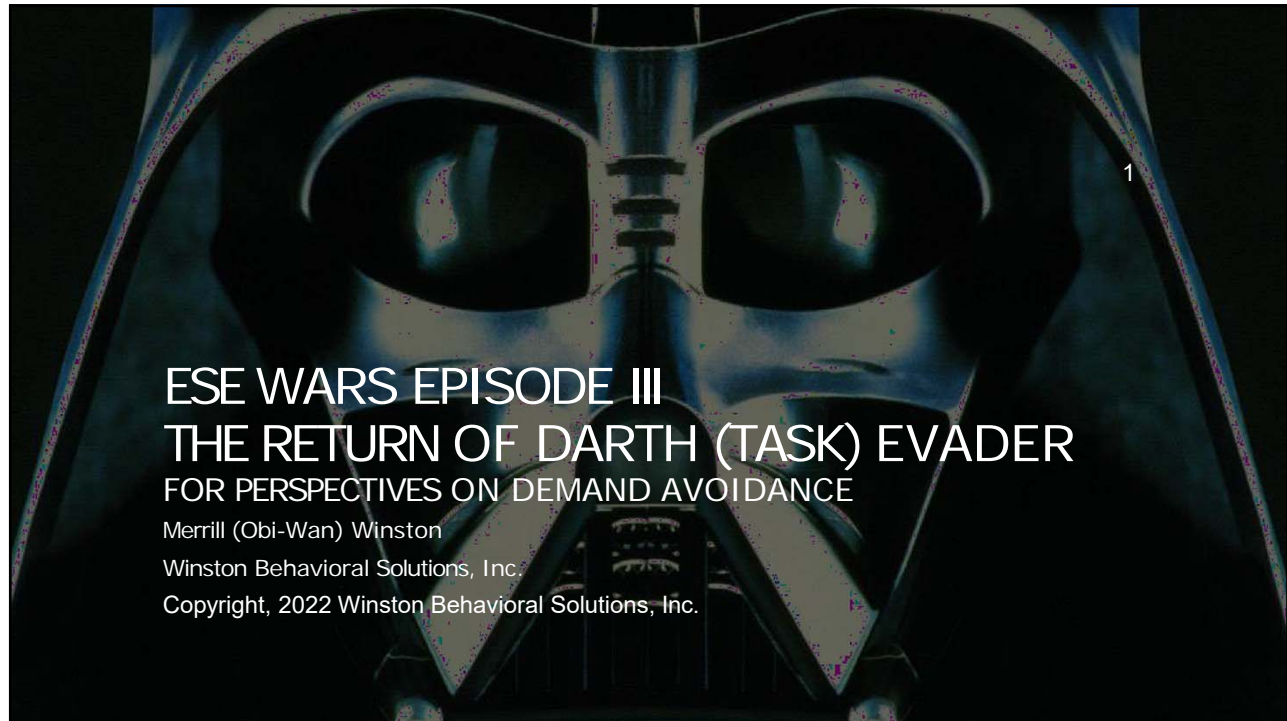
Session 4:

ESE Wars Episode III - The Return of Darth Task Evader An analysis of escape-maintained behavior

Friday November 18, 2022

Presented by

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**A WORD OR TWO ABOUT DIAGNOSES
 (OK 341 WORDS BUT THEY'RE REALLY
 GOOD ONES)**

- There are all sorts of "haves" in medicine
 (thank you Dr. Peter Harzem)
- You have hypertension (a deviation from
 the norm)
- You have a mitral-valve prolapse
 (structural pathology)
- You have Eczema (a visible auto-immune
 condition)
- You have Covid (a communicable
 disease)


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A WORD OR TWO ABOUT DIAGNOSES

- The notion that a child “has” a mental disorder in the same sense that you have high blood pressure (or kidney stones) can sometimes lead to circular reasoning
- Saying that you had a stroke **BECAUSE** you have high blood pressure is **NOT** the same as saying that you hallucinate **BECAUSE** you have schizophrenia!
- Schizophrenia is no more the cause of hallucinations than being a “bully” is the *cause* for punching people in the face and laughing about it!
- Autism is no more a *cause* for stereotyped self-stimulatory behavior, then being a real “A-Hole” is a cause for cutting someone off in traffic.

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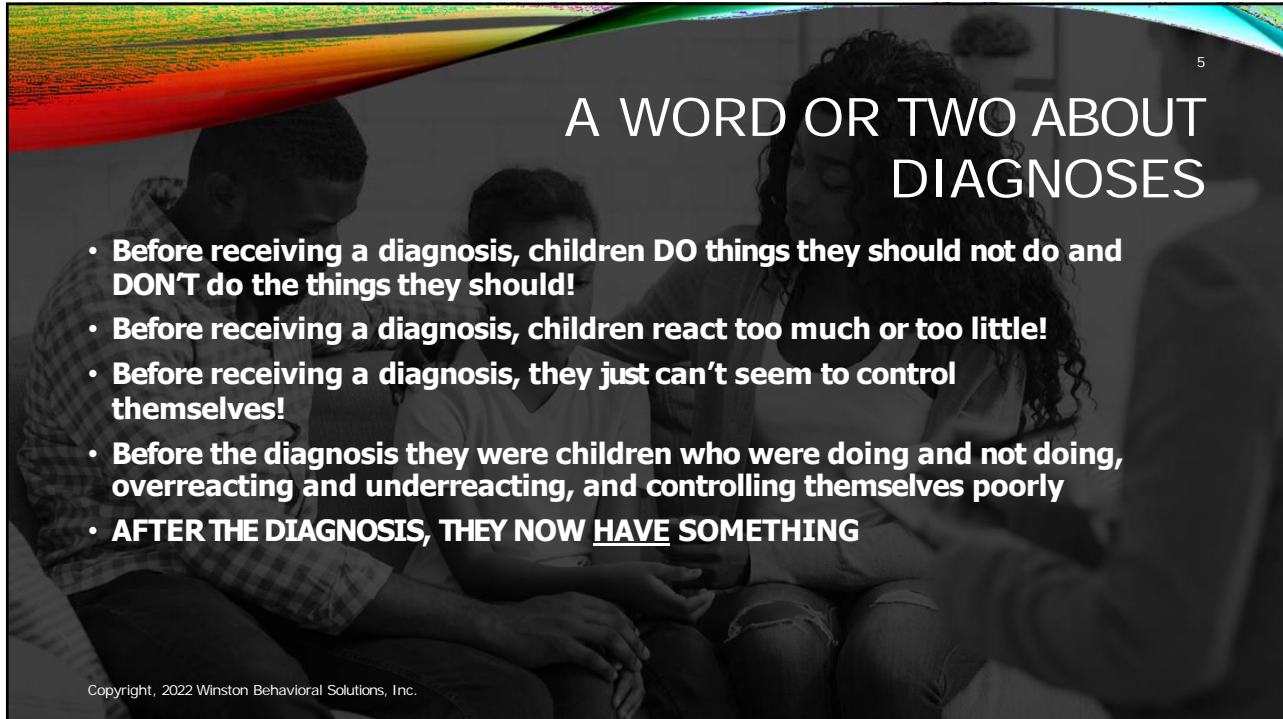
A WORD OR TWO ABOUT DIAGNOSES

- Hallucinating isn't *caused* by schizophrenia; *it gets you the label "schizophrenia."*
- Engaging in repetitive vocal self-stim isn't *caused* by autism; *it gets you the label "autism."*
- Purposefully stepping on someone's jacket because it “shouldn't have been on the floor in the first place” isn't *caused* by being a real A-Hole; *it gets you the label "A-Hole!"*
- Do persons diagnosed as having autism and schizophrenia or ADHD or PDA or depression or bipolar disorder “have” major problems? **Undeniably.**

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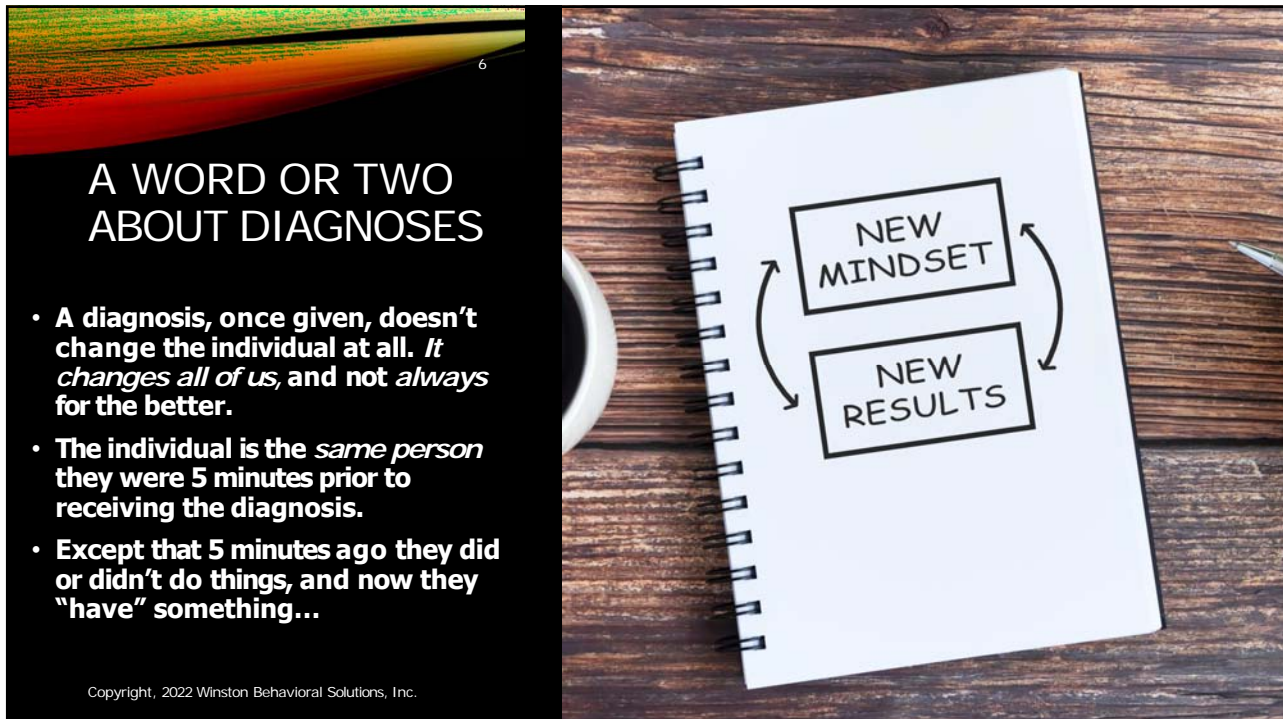
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A WORD OR TWO ABOUT DIAGNOSES

- Before receiving a diagnosis, children **DO** things they should not do and **DON'T** do the things they should!
- Before receiving a diagnosis, children react too much or too little!
- Before receiving a diagnosis, they just can't seem to control themselves!
- Before the diagnosis they were children who were doing and not doing, overreacting and underreacting, and controlling themselves poorly
- **AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS, THEY NOW HAVE SOMETHING**

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A WORD OR TWO ABOUT DIAGNOSES

- A diagnosis, once given, doesn't change the individual at all. *It changes all of us, and not always for the better.*
- The individual is the *same person* they were 5 minutes prior to receiving the diagnosis.
- Except that 5 minutes ago they did or didn't do things, and now they "have" something...

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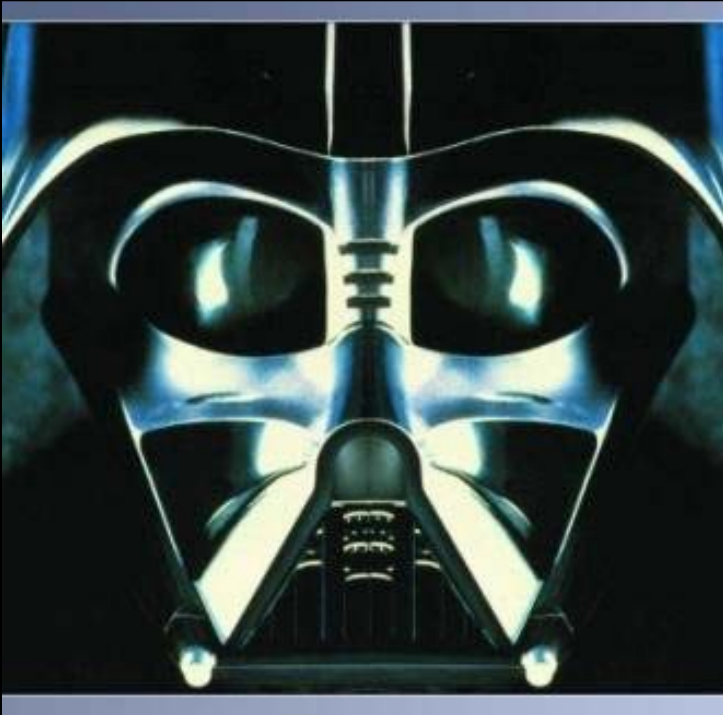
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**A LONG LONG TIME
AGO IN A
CLASSROOM FAR
AWAY....**

- **Ok, actually it was only 15 years ago in West Palm Beach Florida...**
- **We will look at some critical variables and some "neat tricks" for working with children who have extreme escape behaviors when it comes to tasks**
- **Some of the things we will look at are:**

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OVERVIEW

- **What to do about non-compliance!**
- **Using reinforcers effectively, including:**
- **Finding them**
- **Rate**
- **Reinforcer Interruption**
- **Differential Reinforcement**

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OVERVIEW

- **Increasing tolerance to reinforcer removal/termination and delay**
- **Analysis of WHY the child wants to escape**
- **How to alter “educational discriminative stimuli”**
- **What to do with Task Avoidance Juggernauts**

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WHAT ABOUT NON-COMPLIANCE?

- **How to get rid of non-compliance instantly**
- **Ready?**
- **Rename it “self-advocacy!”**
- **True, you can’t advocate your way out of everything (car seats, tooth brushing, bed-time, hair-cuts)**
- **Noncompliance can ONLY exist in the context of a demand coupled with misaligned motivations!**

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ICE-CREAM AND BROCCOLI...

- If you hand the person an ice-cream cone and say, "Here you go, eat your ice-cream."
- And the individual says "no, I don't want it!"
- Then it's typically called "their choice"
- If you set down a bowl of broccoli and say, "Here you go, eat your broccoli."
- When individual says "No." NOW it's non-compliance.



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MISALIGNED MOTIVATIONS EQUALS "NON-COMPLIANCE"

- In the ice-cream scenario, there is an *alignment of motivations*.
- The kid doesn't want the ice-cream, and the parent *doesn't feel the need to push for the ice-cream*
- In the broccoli scenario, there is a *misalignment of motivations*.
- The kid doesn't want the broccoli and the adult **VERY MUCH** needs the kid to eat the broccoli.

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REGARDING DEMAND AVOIDANCE: DEMAND TO DO WHAT???

- Eat your ice cream?
- Eat your broccoli?
- Is escape/avoidance related to specific tasks or classes of tasks?
- All tasks?
- Escape from specific tasks requires an analysis of "why don't they like it?" (we'll get to that...)
- If it is ALL tasks, and almost all requests then there are 3 major possibilities (likely more)
- Up next are 3 frequent scenarios, and they are NOT mutually exclusive!

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SCENARIO 1: I'M THE BOSS OF ME!

- The individual has no problem with ANY of the tasks AS LONG AS THEY ARE SELF-INITIATED
- They don't hate reading. They hate *being told* to read.
- Some individuals actually LIKE working, but HATE being told *when* to work and *what* to work on.
- Like the person who wrote the bullet above.....
- This is a less common problem, but can still result in demand avoidance
- Individuals like this may benefit from a CLEAR SCHEDULE with CLEAR REINFORCERS and there is no prompting or arguing from staff. The schedule and the reinforcers should do ALL the prompting.

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SCENARIO 2: "STICKIN' IT TO THE MAN"

- The individual may not appreciate typical social praise but may enjoy seeing angry, upset, concerned and pleading faces (AKA mild signs of damage).
- A student who refuses to do something NEVER produces smiling in the adult.
- It produces a lot of things but smiling ain't one of them.
- This is an easy way to access that kind of "negative" attention
- It can also be "counter-coercion" (getting back at someone by refusing)

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SCENARIO 3: "YOU AIN'T GOT NOTHING I NEED"

- This individual is primarily suffering from super-low motivation and there are 3 "sub-categories"
 - 1 The individual collects enough "free-floating" non-approved reinforcement and does NOT need your programmed reinforcement that must be earned
 - 2 The individual has VERY limited reinforcers in general (only likes the trampoline)
 - 3 "I'll wait until I get home"

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WHY DO PEOPLE ESCAPE/AVOID?

- When there is no balance in
THE FORCE!



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WHY DO PEOPLE ESCAPE/AVOID?

- If the task difficulty outweighs the reinforcement available for task completion, you get ESCAPE!

SR+



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WHY DO PEOPLE ESCAPE/AVOID?

- The other important issue is....
- What are they escaping to?

People do not escape to a reinforcement “black hole”



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WHAT ARE THE EASIEST THINGS TO CHANGE?

- **Up the reinforcement across all dimensions**
- **Up the magnitude**
- **Up the rate**
- **Up the immediacy (oh boy)**
- **Decrease task difficulty:**
 - **Either by changing the task**
 - **Or by increasing the level of assistance (more helpful types of prompts and less delay between the instruction and the prompt)**



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DO THEY HATE THIS TASK?

- **It is also important to note if they hate...**
- **a particular task, (writing their name)**
- **a class of tasks (all drawing activities) or**
- **something about the *method* of instruction or *when* the instruction is given**
- **The adult...some adults, all adults...**

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DO THEY HATE THIS TASK?

- **Analysis of task aversiveness**
 - **Some tasks acquire their aversive nature because of a single specific problem (it involves writing and the child hates to write)**
 - **Some tasks acquire their aversive nature because of several factors all working together**
 - **Here are 6 potential factors to look for when analyzing the aversive nature of a task...**

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6 POTENTIAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO TASK AVERSION

1. Task-related skill deficits
2. **ERRORS**
3. Rate/mag of reinf problems
4. Duration
5. Fluency (if you're not fluent at it, you probably don't love it)
6. Does it make sense to the child (intrinsic motivation)

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REINFORCERS

- Every child you work with is **copping** some reinforcers, the question is, are you controlling them?
- The first issue is finding *effective reinforcers* for the child
- They must be powerful enough to get the child to attend to them or ask about them with minimal or no prompting
- Incidentally, regardless how often the child talks about something or asks for it, it doesn't mean it's going to function as a reinforcer for the task at hand
- Sometimes, we don't realize something's "not worth it" until we're already halfway in

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REINFORCER TEST...(THOSE W/NO LANGUAGE)

- Take the “alleged” reinforcer and, if possible, bring it to the child. If the child does not look at it or better yet try to take it, MOVE ON
- How upset are they when you stop it? If they bite you, that’s probably going to be a good reinforcer!
- Of course, whether something will function as a reinforcer for the *task at hand* cannot be known ahead of time, but a moderate physiological/emotional reaction from the child is a good sign

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REINFORCER PROBLEMS

- **Can the child tolerate the delay to the reinforcer if given minutes/hours after task completion? (requires rule following for any hope of efficacy)**
- **Can the child “break-clean” from the reinforcer when it’s time to give it up (if it’s a preferred object or activity)**
- **If the reinforcer is given during the task, is it “consumed” quickly?**
- **The longer it takes the child to get and enjoy the reinforcer, the less time there is for teaching**

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REINFORCER PROBLEMS

- Does delivery of the reinforcer kill all motivation to complete the rest of the task or subsequent tasks? (magnitude problems)
- Is the rate of reinforcement sufficient to maintain their attention during the task?
- Is there ANY differential reinforcement taking place?

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DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT

- So many times, the reinforcer magnitude does not increase with task difficulty...
- "Touch red" = goldfish cracker
- "Give me the red truck" = goldfish cracker
- "Write least common multiples of 54,562" = goldfish cracker followed immediately by hair-pull

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DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT

- The reinforcer should be significantly larger for behavior that requires less prompting like, "OMG! You did it all on your own!!!"
- As the quality/independence of the skill improves, and the behavior has stabilized, the level of reinforcement comes back down to the previous level like, "nice work"
- Then there is differential reinforcement for the next improvement (we keep moving the mark)

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TASK COMPLETION IN THE *PARALLEL UNIVERSE*

- In a parallel universe everything is reversed...
- Unlike our own universe, reinforcers are the norm and they are punctuated by brief periods of tasks...
- This procedure is for "hard-core" task avoiders

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REINFORCER INTERRUPTION

- For the most difficult children, start off with some sort of activity that will maintain their attention for at least several minutes (computer, video, toys, whatever)
- Bring a piece of some educational materials with you but don't let the child see it
- You can even just ask academic questions or anything that requires compliance from the child
- Let them "get into" the activity
- Briefly interrupt the activity by getting between them and the activity or, if it is electronic in nature, turn it off or pause it briefly

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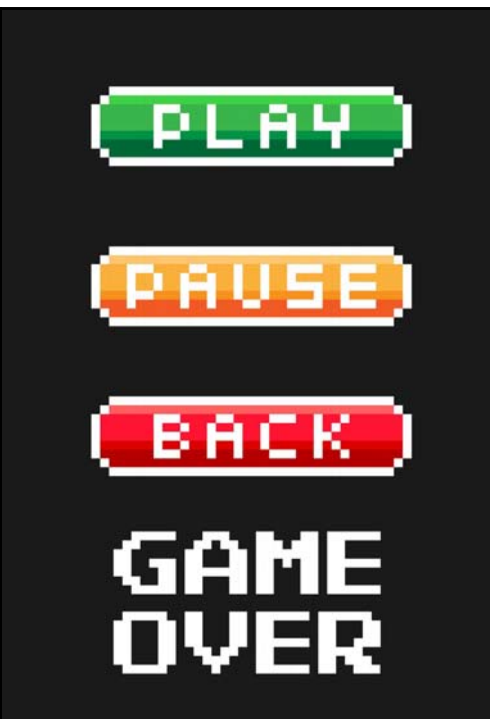
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REINFORCER INTERRUPTION

- Give the instruction, ask the question, whatever, but don't announce that it's coming
- Prompt as much as necessary to get a response QUICKLY
- Immediately let them resume the activity and back away a little bit
- Rinse and Repeat

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REINFORCER INTERRUPTION

- **This technique also addresses the issue of being able to “break” from a reinforcer for a moment without having a fit**
- **Even very sensitive children will likely only have a minor fit the first few trials. Once they realize they aren’t having to “give up” the reinforcer for some indefinite period, they gradually habituate to the momentary termination of the SR+**

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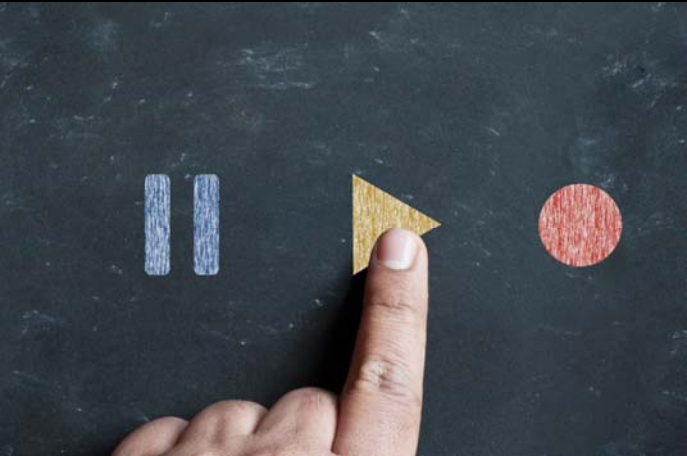
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REINFORCER INTERRUPTION

- **You can couple this procedure with teaching the individual how to appropriately get access to the activity again...**
- **Pause video:**
- **“Show me green” (they do)**
- **What do you want?**
- **“Video” hit play**
- **This can be done in like 5 seconds.**

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REINFORCER INTERRUPTION

- In using reinforcer interruption, you can help the student:
- Habituate to reinforcer removal
- Learn that they will get it back soon
- Learn how to get it back appropriately
- Become accustomed to the "do work" then "ask for SR+" sequence
- Get around the problem of never working long enough *to earn the reinforcer*

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CASE STUDIES

- **The Case of the S-Delta Voice**
- **The Case of the Phantom Reinforcer**
- **The Case of the Cloaked Youngling**

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THE CASE OF THE "S-DELTA VOICE"

- In the ESE quadrant of the WPB school sector there lives a child who was very sensitive to the "S-Delta Voice"
- S-Delta is a stimulus associated with the non-availability of reinforcement
- It didn't matter what was said when speaking with the S-Delta Voice, provided it sounded like the S-Delta Voice.
- Upon hearing the S-Delta Voice this child immediately turned to the dark side.

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THE CASE OF THE "S- DELTA VOICE"

- The "S-Delta Voice" was the tone used when the child was supposed to begin to make some sort of discrimination or otherwise pay attention. It's the "instructional tone" of voice
- It has a "sing-song" quality to it. "Show meeee CHICKen!" "Touch GrEEEn!" "Eyes on MEEEEeee" "Hands on TAAAAble"
- It will drive you crazy in like 30 trials
- But why did it become predictive of a lack of reinforcement?
- Why wasn't the child happy to hear the voice?

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THE CASE OF THE "S-DELTA VOICE"

- This child could sense subtle disturbances in the force that signaled impending task demands
- These changes included:
 - Bringing him to a desk/table*
 - Putting out instructional materials*
 - Using the "S-Delta Voice" (Skittle Probe)

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THE CASE OF THE "S-DELTA VOICE"

- This child hated no specific tasks
- Instead, he hated anything that smelled, looked, sounded, or felt like work
- He did enjoy playful interactions with adults however...
- How do we get this child to do even the simplest task???

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THE CASE OF THE "S-DELTA VOICE"

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- What do we do about the problem with the "S-Delta Voice?"
- Use that voice during all sorts of interactions and not just during tasks
- Vary the tone of voice during instructions so that it approximates a "play-time" voice
- Get the child to cooperate in a play situation first, where cooperation may be greater (motivation to play is high) and the demands much lighter.
- A simple question that shows interest like, "What's your favorite car?" is **STILL** a demand
- It's a demand for information...

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

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- For this child, according to staff, his reinforcers changed rapidly, and they were "elusive"
- We categorized *potential reinforcers* according to the type, and duration that they held his interest.
- Remember first we must determine if the individual even wants to follow-them, look for them, take them from you etc...

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

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- We categorized his “reinforcers” according to...
- **Tangible:** some things he just liked to hold onto and did very little with
- **Activity based:** walking around the carpet, playing with toys, drawing/painting
- **Social:** hugs, praise, clapping, “play”



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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

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- Reinforcers were also categorized according to how long they were likely to maintain his interest
- Functionally, we don't know if they are reinforcers until we “see them in action,” but if they don't hold the person's interest, there's no reason to go any further, is there?
- For many individuals, it's necessary to *perform frequent checks* for the motivation get the scheduled reinforcer as this can change *rapidly* based on changing task difficulty *during the session*
- When the going gets tough...
- **It's time to escape!**

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

- We categorized reinforcers into brief, moderate and extended in terms of the *duration* that they could maintain his interest (he attempted to access them, would not give them up easily)
- Brief: held interest for only a few minutes
- Moderate: held interest at least 30 minutes to an hour
- Extended: held interest all day long

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

- Yes! The categories were arbitrary, but we were doing it to see where most of his reinforcers fell on continuum from short to long-duration reinforcers.
- Why did we want to know about reinforcer efficacy duration?
- You can't do very much "reinforcer interruption" training with short-lived reinforcers, but they may be good to help with transitional periods or for maintaining established behavior

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

- These short-lived reinforcers might also be used to avoid satiation with the moderate and extended reinforcers
- When having difficulty finding strong reinforcers, it becomes increasingly necessary to rank-order task difficulty/preference
- If the current available reinforcers aren't functional for the easiest, most familiar tasks, how can they be for the newer more difficult ones?

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

- With phantom reinforcers, sometimes we just need to step back, stop all task demands and watch the person to see how they spend their time (a non-contrived reinforcer sampling)
- No one has "no reinforcers" or they don't move. At all.
- The problem is that there may be no reinforcers that are either
 - 1. Strong enough to get the individual to start a task (motivational effect)
 - 2. Strong enough to increase the probability of performing the task again tomorrow and the next day (reinforcement effect)
- Seeking, accepting, and eating skittles is a good indication they may be useful as reinforcers, but for which behaviors and under which conditions and for how long?

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

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- With this individual we also categorized tasks according to the probability that he would readily complete them.
- High probability: he was very familiar with, could finish easily, and will finish them on his own once he gets started
- Medium probability: Tasks he tried to escape from about half of the time and always needed prompting to finish
- Low probability: Those tasks that he can do parts of, but that he almost never attempts, or only does so with numerous prompts, with great difficulty and many errors (comprehension-based tasks for him)

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THE CASE OF THE PHANTOM REINFORCER

- Categorizing tasks this way can help to determine the type and magnitude of reinforcer to be used after its completion
- Also, this strategy makes it much easier to implement *behavioral momentum* by having the tasks all laid out in sequence, by category, ahead of time
- Finally, it allows for differential reinforcement, bigger reinforcement for the more difficult tasks

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THE CASE OF THE "CLOAKED" YOUNGLING

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- This child kept her face hidden most of the time by pulling her shirt collar up to cover it and had terrible eye contact.
- When it was discovered that she liked Disney's "Aladdin" the reinforcer interruption procedure was used.
- While watching the video, both arms came down, and her face was clearly visible



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THE CASE OF THE "CLOAKED" CHILD

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- When the video was paused, and she was asked "what color is the genie" she was able to be prompted to say "blue" and to say it while making excellent eye contact (this was done VERY quickly to avoid emotional responding)
- Video was then resumed.
- Interrupting a reinforcer is, for some, a HUGE MO manipulation
- She was SO avoidant of eye-contact (almost like it was a demand) while the video was playing
- She was very quick to make eye contact when it was paused...



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THE CASE OF THE "CLOAKED" CHILD

- **For many of us, we want something more when it is interrupted than we originally did before we got it...**
- **What's worse than no ice-cream at all?**
- **Ice-cream that falls off the cone after 3 licks.**



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IN SUMMARY....

- **Please understand, young Jedi, that we must not merely acknowledge THAT someone wants to avoid/escape, but WHY they wish to do so**
- **Non-compliance requires the context of a demand and mis-matched motivations**
- **Children aren't "non-compliant" as a resting state. Some just seem that way**
- **Interrupting a reinforcer can ultimately be much more productive than repeatedly failing to initiate a task to get a later reinforcer**
- **Children may not be avoiding tasks per se but avoiding the "Task Conditions" due to their difficult learning histories.**
- **A child's unwillingness to cooperate can reflect problems with atypical social reinforcers, a lack of social and non-social reinforcers, a repertoire/skill deficit, or a lack of differential reinforcement in the learning environment**

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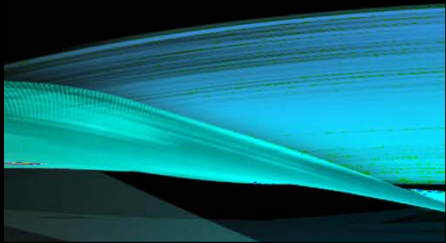
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ALWAYS
REMEMBER....

May the Rein-FORCE-er
be with you!




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Danke	Grazie	Thank you	Merci	Спасибо
-------	--------	--------------	-------	---------

Use your phone's
camera on this QR
code for my
contact info!



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