Behavior Momentum

Definition

A procedure used to increase compliance. The procedure includes identifying a minimum of three behaviors with which the student has a high probability of compliance. At least three requests for high probability responses are then made in succession immediately before making a request with which the student has a low probability of complying. Once the momentum of compliance is started, it is more likely to continue with low probability responses.

Behavior momentum encourages students to follow directions. Start by giving three or more requests that a student will readily do. After successfully completing each request, reinforce the student—this builds "behavior momentum." Now the student is more likely to carry out a more difficult request.

Things to Do

- ✓ Identify HIGH probability behaviors.

- ✓ Request three or more HIGH probability behaviors.

- ✓ Request the LOW probability behavior.

- ✓ Give appropriate consequences.

- ✓ Collect and review data.

- ✓ Gradually reduce requests for high probability behaviors.

☑ Identify HIGH probability behaviors.

High probability behaviors refer to actions that a student likes to do or usually does when asked. Begin by identifying a number of these behaviors that the student will perform at least 70% of the time. One way is to keep a week-long log of requests with which the student readily complies. But remember, identifying high probability behaviors will vary from student to student.

☑ Request three or more HIGH probability behaviors.

Ask the student to do three or more high probability behaviors. For example . . .

> Tom, please help me hand out the papers.

> Thanks Tom. Now help me straighten the chairs.

> You did a great job with the chairs! Please erase the board for me.

Each time Tom successfully completes a request, this increases the behavior momentum effect. Gradually, he's prepared to receive a more difficult directive.

☑ Request the LOW probability behavior.

After making three or more high probability requests, the student is ready for a low probability directive. For example, after Requests 1, 2, and 3 in Step 2 above . . .

> Now Tom, work the 10 problems on your math paper
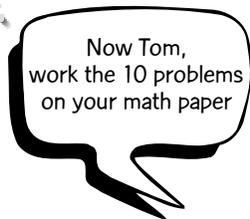
☑ Give appropriate consequences.

Give positive reinforcement when the student successfully performs the low probability behavior. Praise or a combination of praise with a token or tangible reinforcement are effective. For example . . .

> Tom, I like the way you sat down and got right to work on your math paper. You just earned 2 points.

> Tom, that's not following directions. You just lost 5 points.

However, if Tom fails to do the request, then give a preplanned reductive consequence. For example . . .
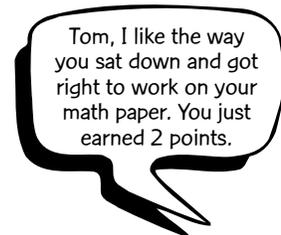
After giving the reductive consequence, be sure to state the request again. Escaping the request may reinforce Tom for not doing it. Therefore, reissue the request and provide either positive reinforcement for compliance or another preplanned reductive consequence if he again fails to follow through.

✓ Collect and review data.

Design and use a data collection system (see *LRBI Checklist: Preliminary Strategies—Data Collection*). On a daily basis, monitor requests of high and low probability behavior. Graph the data. Then review it on a regular basis. Make adjustments as needed, such as:

☞ Changing or increasing positive reinforcement for compliance.

☞ Changing the reductive consequences used for noncompliance.

☞ Changing to more effective requests of high probability behaviors.

☞ Increasing the number of requests of high probability behaviors before requesting a low probability behavior.

# ✓ Gradually reduce requests for high probability behaviors.

As a student's compliance with low probability behaviors improves, gradually reduce the number of high probability requests before asking a low probability request. The ultimate goal is to reduce the ratio of high to low probability request so that the ratio is similar to what usually happens in the instructional environment.

Examples

Example 1

Mr. Cleaver is working with 9-year-old Allison on improving her compliance in a class for students with severe disabilities. After identifying high and low probability behaviors for Allison, he uses the following sequence . . .

HIGH Probability
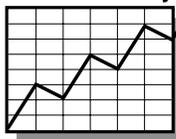
"Allison, tell me your name."
"Allison, give me five."
"Allison, point to the dog."

LOW Probability

"Allison, put your puzzle back on the shelf."

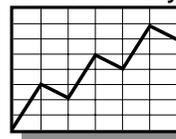If Allison complies with the request to put her puzzle back on the shelf, she receives a poker chip in her cup.

Example 2

Mrs. Evans teaches a junior class for students with behavior disorders. Most of her students have "reducing noncompliance" targeted on their IEPs. With Calvin, she uses the following sequence of requests . . .

HIGH Probability

"Calvin, please deliver this message to Mr. Baker in the front office."
"Calvin, please sharpen these pencils."
"Calvin, mark 2 points on your point card for listening and following directions."

LOW Probability

"Calvin, come to the front table for your spelling test."

If Calvin complies with the low probability request to come to the table, Mrs. Evans compliments him on following the direction and reminds him that he has done a great job of keeping all the lottery tickets in his response cost lottery envelope that day. If he fails to comply, Mrs. Evans says, "Calvin, you didn't come to the table as I asked. You lose a lottery ticket out of your response cost envelope."

Variations of the Technique

✍ Plan behavior momentum into the classroom schedule. Avoid starting the day with "unlikely" activities, such as a review of the previous day's problems, a difficult assignment, or calendar review. Instead, begin with "likely" behavior games or activities, such as "Simon Says," "Seven-Up," team guess of a teacher's selected mystery animal, or reading a high-interest story. Then follow these with less likely activities (e.g., academic assignments, problem review, etc.).

✍ Begin with easy or desired tasks. Then during the day, alternate these with difficult or less-desired tasks.

REMEMBER: Easy and hard tasks or desired and less-desired tasks will vary from student to student.

Potential Problems and Solutions

Ignoring Compliance

Always reinforce students who comply with your requests. Too often, adults ignore compliance, because they fear that reinforcement will disrupt the student's following through with the request. In the long-term. if you want compliance, then it must be reinforced when it takes place. Depending on the student, reinforcement may take the form of praise or praise paired with points, other tokens, tangible items, or edibles (see *LRBI Checklist: Level 1—Positive Reinforcement*).

Ignoring Noncompliance

It is also a mistake to ignore noncompliance when it occurs. A preplanned hierarchy of reductive consequences must be available for use for ***every*** instance of noncompliance. The student must never be permitted to escape the request. Depending upon the student, a reductive hierarchy might consist of the use of ***response cost*** (see *LRBI Checklist: Level 1*), a form of ***timeout*** (see *LRBI Checklists: Levels II and III*), or ***overcorrection*** (see *LRBI Checklists: Levels II and III*).

Getting Ready

✍ When using behavior momentum, make certain there is effective reinforcement planned for compliance.

✍ Preplan a hierarchy of effective behavior management techniques for reducing non-compliance with requests—consistent with LRBI policy.

✍ Review the *Precision Commands* procedures for the most effective way of making a request (see *LRBI Checklist: Preliminary Strategies*). Effectiveness of the behavior momentum intervention is enhanced by using *Precision Commands* procedures when requesting high or low probability behaviors.

Materials and Supplies

✍ Preplanned positive reinforcers.

✍ Preplanned reductive hierarchy.

✍ *Precision Command* checklist.

References

Mace, F. C., Hock, M. L., Lalli, J. S., West, B. J., Belfiore, P., Rinter, E., & Brown, D. K. (1988). Behavioral momentum in the treatment of noncompliance. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, *2*(21), 123-141.

Rhode, G., Jenson, W. R., & Reavis, H. K. (1992). *The tough kid book*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.