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## What is shaping and chaining in psychology

**SHAPING AND CHAINING** **SHAPING DEFINED:** If a behavior never occurs, we say that it is not in the person's repertoire. Modeling is a way to add behaviors to a person's repertoire. Modeling is used when the target behavior does not already exist. In conformation, what is reinforced is an approximation of the target behavior. Approach means any behavior that is similar to the desired behavior or that brings the person closer to the desired behavior. Successive approximations are steps toward the target behavior, the behavior you want to shape. By playing Hot & Cold, you reinforce any move that brings the player closer to the prize. Each of these successive movements is a closer approximation of the desired behavior. If the prize is under the couch, and the player moves towards the couch, every time the player steps up to the couch, you are screaming warmer, and you are reinforcing the behavior. If the player walks away from the couch, you'd scream, colder (no reinforcement). The general rule is that you are reinforcing any behavior that is a closer approximation of target behavior than the behavior you last reinforced. If a new approximation does not occur, the last approximation is reinforced again. If an approximation is repeated and reinforced three times, you can retain the reinforcement the next time that behavior appears. If no new approximation appears, you must return to a pre-reinforced behavior. Sometimes you will get good progress for a while, only for the child to emit behavior that was reinforced several steps before. You may need to reinforce that old behavior and shape through the sequence again. This procedure can be like helping someone climb a ladder. Sometimes progress is effortless and going fast, other times it is slow and difficult. Sometimes the person can jump over the next step; then you can turn down the stairs a few steps and you have to help him climb those same steps again. Therefore, although the procedure is simple, it is not always easy to implement. **RULES FOR SHAPING:** Define the target behavior: the behavior you want has not yet occurred; is the goal at the end of the process, so you have to decide what behavior should be formed. To get to the target behavior, you need to have a clear idea of what it is. Reinforce successive approximations of target behavior: The target behavior is 'formed' by reinforcing the closest approximations of that behavior. If the child gets stuck at a particular step, he or she can usually induce variability in behavior by retaining reinforcement. Some of the new behavior will be in the where you want the behavior to go and then it can be reinforced. Reinforces an approximation several times or until a closer approximation appears, whichever comes first. If no new approach has appeared reinforcements, retain the reinforcement until a new approach occurs. (Note: see Prompting and Fading flyer to help foster new approaches) In general, training progresses faster when increases in reinforcement requirements are small. When expected for something better, the something better should be just a very light improvement. If an approach appears that is a breakthrough, reinforce; but you don't look at great progress. You will have to make judgments about when to raise the bar and for how much; sometimes, you'll be wrong. If you get it wrong on the precautionary side, reinforcing behavior in a given step more often than necessary and making very small increases in reinforcement requirements, the worst thing that is likely to happen is that progress will be slow. If you make the mistake of moving too fast, then progress will stop and you may see some strong emotional reactions. If the progress is broken down, you can return to a previous level. Monitor results: The only way to measure the success you're having in modeling behavior is by observing what behavioral changes are occurring. Are you seeing progress towards target behavior? Is the behavior that occurs now closer to the target behavior than the behavior you obtained earlier? Is it time to expect a closer approximation of target behavior? Has the behavior begun to decompose? Should you go back to a previous level? These are questions you should ask when shaped and can respond to behavior only by paying close attention to behavioral changes. Taking data at each step, tracking approaches and message levels helps you determine responses. Graphing the data you've taken in a skill can help you determine the answers to many of these questions at a glance. **CHAINING DEFINED:** The new behavior you want to create can be a series or chain of behaviors. A behavior chain is a series of related behaviors, each of which provides the cue for the next and last that produces a booster. Almost everything we do can be considered part of a chain of behavior. For example, when you recite the alphabet, it starts with A, then with B, then C, and so on until the task is completed in Z. Each step serves as a signal for the next step; a string is really a series of signals and behaviors. Terminating a behavior in a string produces the signal for the next action. Say G is the signal to say H below. Virtually any complex behavior we do in the path of operating behavior is part of a chain or a multitude of eat, dress, use the computer, count, brush your teeth, bike, walk to school and so on. Behavior chains are very important to all of us; as is the procedure for building chains, which is called chaining. Chaining, is the reinforcement of successive elements of a chain of behavior. If you're teaching your child the alphabet, you're trying to build a chain, if you're teaching the shoelaces, you're also trying to build a chain. There are two chaining procedures, chaining back and forth. **CHAINING:** Forward chaining is a chaining procedure that begins with the first element of the chain and progresses to the last element (A through Z). In forward chaining, you start with the first task in the chain (A). Once the child can perform that item successfully, you make him perform the first and second elements (A&B) and reinforce this effort. Do not teach A, then teach B separately; A and B are taught together. When mastered, you can move to A, B, and C. Notice that they are not taught in isolation; hence the term string. **CHAINING BACKWARD:** This is often a very effective way to develop complex sequences of behavior. In forward chaining, you are teaching from A to Z; in backward teaching, you are teaching from Z to A. Backward chaining is a chaining procedure that begins with the last element in the string and moves to the first element. To illustrate backward chaining, consider the following example: I want to teach my child how to complete a six-piece puzzle. The steps are: put in first piece put in second piece put in third piece put in fourth piece put in fifth piece put in sixth piece To chain this task, I would follow steps one to 5 myself, presenting the task as completed except for the last piece. Then I (using the required level of promptness) would teach my child to put the sixth piece (step 6). When I can do this successfully several times, I will teach step 5 and 6 (completing steps 1 through 4 myself beforehand). Chaining back this puzzle gave my son the idea of what he was doing early (there were not only a lot of puzzle pieces there) and teaching in this way gives an even clearer clue to the next step. I'd be reinforcing every step as I'm teaching it, but once my child learns step 6, I'll just reinforce steps 5 and 6 together (next link in the chain). **RULES FOR CHAINING:** Define target behavior: To teach someone how to perform links in a chain, you need to know exactly what those links are. Sometimes the links are very obvious as in the examples of teaching the alphabet, or the six-piece puzzle, other links are sometimes not so obvious. It may be helpful to perform the target behavior yourself and take note of all the steps involved, including doing someone else sees it and compares notes. As I showed my son a bathing routine, I was so proud of the links I thought to produce the chain. I introduced him to one of my workers who looked at him and said where does he say where he flushes the toilet? Toilet?. the string in small manageable steps is called performing a task analysis and an easy way to describe it is to teach from A to Z and every letter in the middle. Children with autism/pdd have shown that they can learn very effectively using this method. Reinforce successive string elements: String elements must be reinforced in sequence. Reinforce them as they happen. Once your child has mastered step 6 and you start teaching step 5, you'll be reinforcing steps 5 and 6. You will reinforce yourself at the end of the chain or at the end of most of

the chain as the child has learned. What you learn in a chain is not just a series of tasks; you learn to perform those tasks in the right order. You can start at the beginning of the chain and work your way to the end or vice versa. Monitor results: As with any intervention, you should track the effects of your efforts. Has a particular element been mastered? Should it be taught and reinforced a few more times? Is it time to move on to the next item? These are judgments that must be made during the chaining process, and can be done accurately only if you carefully monitor the results you are receiving. The similarity between modeling and chaining is that the goal in each case is to establish target behavior that does not yet occur. The difference is that modeling always advances. If progress breaks, you may have to take a step back before moving forward again, but there is no such thing as forming backwards. CHAINING DATA SHEET 2: August 12, 2002 (c) BBB Autism – June 2002 ALL HANDOUTS AND LITERATURE ARE THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF BBB AUTISM AND ARE NOT COPIED WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION. A notice to our readers... BBB Autism Support Network is not a doctor. This article may refer to books, service providers, agencies and websites that may be of interest to the reader. BBB Autism or its founder makes a presentation or warranty regarding the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in any of these locations, and specifically disclaims any liability for any information contained therein, or omissions therein. Reference to these websites or books in this document shall not be construed as an endorsement of these websites or books or the information contained therein, by BBB Autism or its founder. This article is based solely on parents' comments and experiences. The information is not intended to be taken as medical advice. Permission to reproduce and distribute may be granted by contacting the author at liz@deaknet.com. This document must be displayed in its entirety. Other permissions can be requested by email: liz@deaknet.com. purpose of this copyright is to prevent publishers from using it to gain commercial advantages, and to prevent ill-intentioned persons from altering the meaning of the document by changing or some paragraphs.

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