

Course: Encouraging Expected Behavior

Lesson: Specific Positive Feedback

Transcript

This lesson describes the use of specific positive feedback, a form of social reinforcement that provides information on successful behavior while reinforcing or increasing the likelihood that behavior will be repeated. Specific positive feedback is essential in changing and sustaining expected behavior.

There is 1 handout that will be referenced during this lesson. If you have not downloaded it from the lesson website, please pause the video while you access this document.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate specific positive feedback that explicitly describes behavior and uses rationales.

General praise or commonly used phrases such as “good job,” though important for a pleasant classroom, are inadequate for building and sustaining desired behavior. Students need clear, specific feedback on their use of the schoolwide expectations. Specific Positive Feedback is essential to changing student behavior and creating a positive school environment.

Here are key terms and acronyms that will be used in this lesson.

SPECIFIC POSITIVE FEEDBACK—verbal reinforcement; a form of social reinforcement that provides information on successful behavior while reinforcing or increasing the likelihood that behavior will be repeated; combines social attention, instruction, and reinforcement.

PRAISE—a general expression of admiration for performance that serves to reinforce the behavior; verbal recognition.

NON-CONTINGENT ATTENTION—attention provided regardless of performance and includes such things as greetings, proximity, smiles, and conversations.

CONTINGENT ATTENTION—attention that is provided based upon student performance of an identified expectation or behavior.

The preferred adult behaviors and non-contingent attention that were discussed in the previous lesson are not sufficient to change and sustain behavior; contingent attention, or specific positive feedback is essential. With specific positive feedback you are recognizing attainment of specified performance criteria, effort, or successes at tasks that are difficult for the child. To ensure continued use, specific positive feedback is essential.

Effective specific positive feedback includes three components. It:

- 1) Specifically describes the behavior.
- 2) Provides a rationale.
- 3) Can include a tangible item or preferred activity.

We will walk through each of these components now.

1) Specifically describe the behavior. Students need to know explicitly what behavior they did that was correct and earned the acknowledgement of the teacher. Teachers readily do this when giving feedback about academic work. Teachers often use a rubric when reviewing academic work that helps specifically describe the desirable assignment expectations. It has been described as acting “like a video camera, helping students see their own positive behavior.” In effective praise we simply describe the behavior observed to make the feedback clear and specific.

For example, “When I said it was time to begin your assignment, you cleared off your desk, got your materials out immediately, and began working quickly.”

That statement is a video replay of exactly what the student did. Do not add any references to past mistakes the student has made or wishes for future behavior. Simply describe exactly what you saw that you want the student to continue doing in the future. Additionally, be cautious in adding “I’m proud of you.” We want students doing the appropriate behavior because of the benefits to them rather than simply to please the teacher.

2) Provides a rationale. Explain the reason why the behavior is important. Rationales or reasons teach the students the benefits of their behavior and the impact it has on them and others. This often includes stating the overarching schoolwide expectations and pointing out what the student might expect could happen if they use the appropriate behavior.

For example, “Getting started right away like that shows cooperation and will help you avoid having homework.”

3) Can include a tangible item or preferred activity. For many students, the specific positive feedback alone is sufficiently reinforcing to strengthen the behavior. However, for some students, and when a behavior requires a great deal of effort, pairing the verbal feedback with tangible or activity reinforcement may be helpful. When using a tangible item or preferred activity it is imperative that you also use the verbal feedback so that students know exactly what they did that resulted in earning the consequence.

You will want to say something like, “Because you walked so quietly in the hallway, you earned a Cardinal Card.”

Note that adults do not “give,” instead students “earn.” Careful use of these terms helps students to take ownership for their behaviors and teaches the link between appropriate behavior and positive outcomes. Tangible Reinforcers will be discussed more in depth in the next lesson.

In summary, effective specific positive feedback includes three components. It specifically describes the behavior, provides a rationale, and can include a tangible item or preferred activity.

Here are some examples of specific positive feedback statements that include all three components.

"I noticed you have been getting to class on time, Jose. That shows respect for your teachers and shows you are taking your classwork seriously. Here is a Warrior Way Ticket"

"Jackson, you asked Fred to play the computer game with you. That shows caring, and when you include others they will be more likely to include you. You have earned 5 extra minutes of computer time."

"Wow, Jill, you were on task; you got your journal out right away and worked the entire writing time! You should be proud of yourself. That's being responsible. Here is a Mustang Ticket."

It is also important that specific positive feedback be given sincerely and appropriately for the student's age. This is especially important when working with older students. Staff need to find their own style to communicate sincere care and concern for the student.

When we acknowledge positive student behavior as described here, we help students learn behavior that will lead to success in school and adult life.

Role-play the examples of specific positive feedback provided on the handout, *Specific Positive Feedback Examples*. When you are comfortable with these, role-play delivering specific positive feedback spontaneously using your school's expectations and specific behaviors from your matrix.

Pause the video, and when you are ready, continue watching.

There are some additional considerations for when and how to use specific positive feedback. Staff should use specific positive feedback:

Contingently. Since students "earn" specific positive feedback and consequences, it is provided only when they have demonstrated the desired behavior.

Immediately. Specific positive feedback is best when it closely follows the behavior so students can connect what they did with the feedback they are receiving. The younger the student, the more important this is.

Frequently when trying to build a new behavior. When students are learning new skills, provide feedback on a continuous schedule. This means that every time the student displays the desired behavior, they receive specific positive feedback.

Unpredictably or Intermittently to maintain behavior. Once the skill or behavior has been learned, you can shift to use of general praise and occasional use of specific positive feedback. This intermittent use of specific positive feedback helps to maintain the behavior. We must be careful not to omit all specific positive feedback as students may not sustain the skills that they have learned.

We have discussed how to use adult attention (specific positive feedback) contingent upon performing a specific behavior to build or maintain that behavior. Another important point in building positive

classroom environments is to ensure that appropriate behavior receives much more attention (at a higher ratio) than inappropriate behavior. We want students to experience predominantly positive interactions across all school settings.

An average ratio of 4 to 1 teacher interactions is recommended; that means teachers and staff should provide four responses to desired student behavior to every one response to student misbehavior. Interactions with students are considered positive or negative based on the behavior of the student at the time the attention is given, not the demeanor of the teacher.

Reflect on the power of specific positive feedback.

- How extensively is it being used in your school?
- Is there a ratio of four times more positive interactions with students than negative?
- What are some ways that you can share what you have learned about the role of specific positive feedback in SW-PBS with your staff?

Pause the video, and when you are ready, continue watching.

During this lesson, you learned about specific positive feedback. Specific positive feedback is contingent attention that includes a description of the behavior, a rationale for why it is important, and a possible tangible item. Specific positive feedback is essential to change and sustain behavior.

- What information from this lesson will you share with your staff?
- How will it be shared, when will it be shared, and who will share it?

Next steps include updating your Tier 1 Action Plan. Develop action steps and a timeline for completion for working with staff on the importance of providing high rates of specific positive feedback in response to student displays of expected behavior.

Additional information about *Specific Positive Feedback* can be found in Chapter 5 of the *Missouri SW-PBS Tier 1 Team Workbook* which can be found at www.pbissmissouri.org.

When you are ready, continue to the next lesson, *Tangible Reinforcers and a Menu of Reinforcers*, where you will learn about setting up a comprehensive schoolwide recognition system.

Here are the references for this lesson. If more references are needed, you can refer to the Reference section in the *Missouri SW-PBS Tier 1 Team Workbook* available on the Missouri SW-PBS website.

This lesson was made possible with funds from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Special Education; the National Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and the University of Missouri Center for Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support.

