ASK YOUR PARENTS how children were disciplined when they were in school. A naught child may have been spanked for disrupting class. Today, however, teachers and other caregivers use various methods to modify behavior. In this unit, you will learn about the different methods of behavior modification and which ones have a positive effect on children and adults.

Objective:

Describe behavior modification methods.

Key Terms:

- behavior modification
- corporal punishment
- external rewards
- internal rewards
- negative reinforcement
- positive reinforcement
- punishment
- self-efficacy

Methods of Behavior Modification

A teacher or caregiver can guide people and encourage good behavior. Praise and punishment are methods used to alter behavior, but some methods are better than others. In fact, some methods may even be harmful. Therefore, it is important for caregivers to foster a good relationship and help the individuals build self-confidence while modifying any negative behavior.
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT

**Positive reinforcement** is the giving or granting of a reward based on a behavior. **External rewards** are tangible items (e.g., money, trophies, toys, or stickers) and intangible items (e.g., a handshake, smile, or praise) used to positively reinforce a behavior. **Internal rewards** are inner rewards that encourage a person to repeat a behavior (e.g., a feeling of pride, personal accomplishment, and self-confidence).

**Negative reinforcement** is the removal of something or the changing of a condition that a person does not desire. Removing something will allow a person to recognize how his or her actions created an undesirable circumstance. An example of negative reinforcement would be removing a child’s toy airplane from a house roof. The child wishes to play with the airplane, but he or she will learn through negative reinforcement that if it is thrown on the roof, he or she can no longer play with it. Another example is that a boss does not praise an employee for a report that is unsatisfactory. The employee will then work to provide a satisfactory report to get praise from the boss the next time. Negative reinforcement is not the same as punishment.

PUNISHMENT

**Punishment** is words or actions that are unwanted by a person. A child might be punished by having his or her video games taken away for one day. An older teen might be punished for speeding and receive a speeding ticket. Punishment can be an effective way to modify behavior. However, it does so in a negative way and should be avoided. Punishment may create a negative relationship between the punisher and the person being punished. For example, a child may not like a teacher who routinely makes the child stay in from recess as a punishment. When individuals become used to a punishment, it becomes ineffective. In response, the punisher must think of a harsher reprimand.

**Corporal punishment** is the use of physical force to inflict discomfort in order to change behavior in a person. It is most commonly viewed as a punishment for children. Examples of corporal punishment are spanking, hitting, paddling, or shaking. Corporal punishment is illegal in public schools and childcare centers in some states. Laws ensure the right to be free from abuse or neglect in adult care facilities.
Corporal punishment can produce negative side effects for the development of children and should be avoided. It can be embarrassing for children, especially if the punishment is conducted in the presence of others. Corporal punishment may sometimes result in physical harm. In addition, children tend to repeat what adults in their lives model. If a child sees an adult use corporal punishment, the child may be more likely to use corporal punishment with other children.

**EFFECTIVE MODIFICATION**

**Behavior modification** is the practice of changing unacceptable behavior through the rewarding of acceptable behavior. It is the most effective way to work with all ages and development levels. Behavior modification values all people and creates **self-efficacy**—the ability of a person to build self-confidence.

It could be used as an alternative to punishment in many ways. For example, you could provide a space where people can calm themselves if needed. A couch or carpet square in a quiet corner could help people calm down from a stressful situation. Allow individuals to fix their own undesirable behaviors. For instance, if a person spills a liquid in the kitchen, permit that person to clean the mess instead of punishing the behavior. Set clear expectations. Make sure people are aware of the rules that must be followed.

**Summary:**

Positive reinforcement is the giving or granting of a reward based on a behavior. The rewards can be external or internal. In contrast, negative reinforcement is the removal of something or the changing of a condition that a person does not desire. Punishment consists of words or actions that are unwanted by a person. It can be an effective way to modify a person’s behavior. However, it does so in a negative way and should be avoided. Behavior modification is the practice of changing unaccept-
able behavior through the rewarding of acceptable behavior. It is the most effective way to work with all ages and development levels.

**Checking Your Knowledge:**

1. What is positive reinforcement?
2. What are three examples of external rewards?
3. What are three examples of internal rewards?
4. What is corporal punishment?
5. What is self-efficacy?

**Expanding Your Knowledge:**

Visit a preschool or childcare classroom to observe the teachers working with children. Watch for examples of behavior modification. Take notes, citing specific examples of positive and negative reinforcement you witness. How are external rewards used in the classroom? If tangible items (e.g., stickers) are not distributed, are intangible items (e.g., praise) given?

**Web Links:**

- **Behavior Modification Charts**
  

- **Positive Classroom Discipline**
  

- **Positive Reinforcement and Rewards**
  
  [http://www.ces.purdue.edu/providerparent/PDF%20Links/PositiveReinfRewards.pdf](http://www.ces.purdue.edu/providerparent/PDF%20Links/PositiveReinfRewards.pdf)