

Intervention Case Study 14

This study looks at the use of high probability requests by peers to reduce problem behavior. High probability requests are those requests that are easy for a person to fulfill-hence there is a high probability the person will comply with the request without problem behavior.

Introduction

Patty is a 6 year old girl diagnosed with an emotional-behavioral disorder. She attends school and spends half her morning in kindergarten and the rest of her school day in a special education class for children with emotional-behavioral disorders. She displays such problem behavior as hitting and kicking other students and refusing to play.

Measurement

Researchers looked at Patty's individual education plan and talked to her teachers to determine which activities Patty performed regularly and those she did not. Researchers picked tasks that Patty was able to do. Low probability requests are those requests to Patty about social interaction that she often refuses to do. Examples of low probability requests include sharing food and toys with other children as well as helping other children. High probability requests are those requests that Patty does often comply with including pointing to objects and picking up objects.

Intervention

The goal of the intervention was to increase compliance with low probability requests related to social competence. Patty has free play time with a group of several nondisabled children. Three of these children were trained to use high probability requests. Researchers described the high probability requests to the children and roleplayed the requests with the children. At first, researchers used verbal prompts in the form of whispers or nonverbal gestures to remind the children to make the requests, but eventually the children used the intervention without any prompts. The untrained children served as the recipients of the requests. So the trained child might ask Patty to hand a toy to the untrained child.

The trained child requested Patty to do three high probability actions in a row and then immediately after the completion of the third, requested Patty do a low probability action. If Patty completed the low probability action, the child praised her. Researchers varied whether the high probability requests varied or did not. In the variant condition, three high probability requests were randomly selected and used before the low probability request. In the invariant condition, the same three high probability requests were used every time in the same order before the low probability request.

Results

Patty complied with the low probability request 19% of the time before the intervention and increased to 89% of the time during the intervention for the variant condition and 45% during the invariant condition. Patty even decreased her compliance to high probability requests during the variant phase. It may be that using the same high probability requests makes them associated with the low probability request and so they become aversive. The study supported the idea that peers of children can carry out a successful intervention. Varying the high probability requests

that preceded the low probability request worked better than maintaining the same high probability requests.

Davis, C.A., & Reichle, J. (1996). Variant and invariant high-probability requests: Increasing appropriate behaviors in children with emotional-behavioral disorders. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 29, 471-482.