

Nomanis Notes

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Is behavioural momentum an effective means of reducing non-compliance?

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Statement of the problem

Students may be non-compliant to teacher requests or directions, even to the most basic of instructions. Some of these students do not have a hearing impairment, do comprehend the instructions and are able to perform the behaviours requested, but remain non-compliant. Severe non-compliance can make it impossible to teach a child and can lead to, or be associated with serious antisocial behaviour.

Proposed solution/intervention

When using behavioural momentum (also called a high-probability command sequence), the teacher identifies requests that the student is likely to comply with, as well as those that the child is likely to refuse. The teacher then promotes compliance by embedding instructions where the student is likely to be non-compliant in a sequence of instructions or requests that the student is very likely to follow. For example “Get your maths book,” “Get your pencil,” “Write the date”, “Now answer the questions”. The instructions should be given at one to five second intervals. The teacher praises or otherwise rewards compliance with ALL instructions. It is helpful to have an assortment of requests the child is likely to comply with and to use different requests and sequences each time.

The theoretical rationale

This intervention is one that changes the antecedents or context of a problem behaviour. By delivering a sequence of requests, the teacher provides the child with multiple opportunities to respond. By choosing instructions that the child is very likely to comply with, the teacher provides the student with the opportunity to receive a preferred reinforcer. Delivering appropriate, reinforcing consequences for compliance to multiple requests, primes the child to continue to comply. When the problem request is delivered the “momentum” will carry the child through compliance with a previously refused request.

What does the research say? What is the evidence for its efficacy?

A number of single subject studies, and a review of single subject studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the procedures with students with and without disabilities in pre-school and school settings. Requests have been delivered by both adults and peers. A recent meta-analysis of single-subject research confirmed behavioural momentum as a useful intervention for students with ASD.

Conclusion

This is a reasonably simple procedure that is positive, proactive, unobtrusive, and flexible. It is likely to be successful if the requests are things the students can easily do.

Key references

Cowan, R.J., Abel, L. & Candel, L. (2017) A meta-analysis of single-subject research on behavioural momentum to enhance success in students with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47, 1461-1477.

Lipschultz, J., & Wilder, D.A. (2017). Recent research on the high-probability instructional sequence: A brief review. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 50, 424-428. doi: 10.1002/jaba.378