



# Wyomissing Behavior Analysts, Ltd.

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## PROACTIVE & REACTIVE STRATEGIES

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Strategies for dealing with challenging behaviors (i.e., problem behaviors) can be classified as either PROACTIVE or REACTIVE.

Proactive Strategies are interventions which are used on an ongoing basis in an attempt to reduce the likelihood of occurrence of the challenging behavior. They are preventative and usually deal with the conditions that precede the behavior. The goal of Proactive Strategies is to reduce the future probability of the behavior.

Reactive Strategies are interventions which are used only once the behavior occurs. They are consequences (or reactions) to the behavior. The goal is to cut short the behavior, to minimize the damage.

A helpful analogy is fire management. Fire Departments use both Proactive and Reactive Strategies to protect people and property from the harmful effects of fire. Firemen teach fire safety courses to children and families (Proactive); they inspect buildings to insure compliance with codes (Proactive); they sponsor educational advertisements on television (Proactive). When there is a fire, they put out the fires and try to save lives and property (Reactive).

Positive Approaches to Behavior Management (and fire management) emphasize the use of Proactive as opposed to Reactive Strategies. If we do a good job with the Proactive Strategies, the Reactive Strategies will not be necessary (or at least will be necessary less often).

We can subdivide Proactive Strategies into 3 classes based on the focus of the intervention:

1. Environmental Adjustments
2. Positive Programming
3. Direct Treatments

Environmental Adjustments include any planned changes in the environment intended to make the challenging behavior less likely. Such adjustments attempt to fit the environment to the individual. A hyperactive child's behavior is less likely to be a problem in a funhouse than in an antique shop.

Positive Programming includes training in new skills to help the person deal with his/her environment and make the challenging behaviors unnecessary. Positive Programming attempts to fit the individual to the environment.

Direct Treatments attempt to establish rapid control until the slower, but more permanent, effects of Positive Programming can be achieved. Examples include various reward schedules, medication, dietary control, etc. The distinction from Environmental Adjustments is minimal. The point is that they are more direct preventative strategies.

We can subdivide Reactive Strategies into 2 classes:

1. Direct Treatments
2. Crisis Intervention

Punishment is a Direct Treatment that is a Reactive Strategy. Nothing happens unless the behavior occurs.

Crisis Intervention Techniques are intended to insure the safety of the individual. They are used only as necessary. The goal is to stop the behavior, not necessarily reduce the probability of the behavior in the future.

If my daughter had a temper tantrum in the Mall, I might buy her an ice cream to make her happy. This would be a Reactive Strategy. I ended the temper tantrum, but probably increased the likelihood of tantrums in the future. I better figure out some Proactive Strategies to deal with the tantrums (or just let my wife take her to the Mall from now on!).

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