



# Wyomissing Behavior Analysts, Ltd.

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## REDIRECTION

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'Redirection' is a rather popular term in the developmental disabilities field. We are always wanting to redirect people. I once heard someone on a radio talk show recommend 'redirection' for a prostitute with a history of repeat arrests. It took me by some surprise to hear someone out of the field using the term.

How do you 'redirect' a prostitute? I presume that what she meant was we need to provide the person with an alternative way to earn money so she will not need to prostitute herself anymore. The challenge will be finding a vocation that is in fact functionally equivalent (remember that buzzword?). What skill could we teach the person that would allow her to make as much money, provides the same social stimulation, ..., and is also legal?

Redirection is the process of guiding a person toward an alternative way of obtaining Reward. The person is starting to go down a wrong path, so we do something to redirect him/her to the right path. We either redirect the person to an alternative way of getting the same Reward (e.g., talking rather than hitting to get attention) or an alternative way of getting some alternative Reward (e.g., work to earn money rather than hitting to get attention).

Redirection should be to some more preferable alternative and not just from the undesirable/challenging behavior. The guidance we provide should communicate "Do this instead".

Redirection is usually assumed to be a rather positive intervention, but it does have some pitfalls:

1. Redirection is a reactive (as opposed to proactive) intervention. When a challenging behavior occurs, we redirect. 'Direction' would be the proactive version of Redirection. The more Direction we provide in the first place, the less Redirection should be necessary. If Reward is only made available through Redirection, then the challenging behavior will be maintained in order to gain the Redirection (and, in turn, the Reward).
2. We often redirect without consideration of the reason for the challenging behavior (i.e., we fail to do a quick functional analysis). It becomes a way of ignoring the real problem. How would you like it if every time you got upset about something someone said to you: "Oh come on, let's do this 500 piece puzzle". I think I would be frustrated, insulted and more upset than ever. It would be a real insult!

Used appropriately and in the context of other proactive strategies, Redirection can be an effective alternative to Punishment. When a challenging behavior occurs our focus should be not just on communicating what not to do (Punishment), but what to do instead (Redirection). Whereas Punishment signals the end of Reward, Redirection signals a new opportunity for Reward. Redirection gets the person back on the 'right track'.



“Don’t forget, if you do the puzzle 18 more times, you’ll make the Guinness Book of Records!”

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