



## FACT SHEET | U of M LEND Program

# CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS SERIES

## Tolerance for Delay of Reinforcement

### What is tolerance for delay of reinforcement?

- This strategy influences challenging behavior by cuing the child and providing reinforcement contingent on continued participation in a requested activity. For example, if a child is finished with snack and wants to go outside and play but he/she must wait for the other children to finish, a teacher will usually prompt the child by saying, Just a few more minutes and then we'll go outside or When everyone is finished, we'll go outside.
- Some children will respond to this verbal cue and be able to wait. Others may engage in challenging behaviors to escape snack and gain access to going outside more quickly. In this second scenario, the child must be taught to tolerate the delay of reinforcement by making going outside contingent on the child being able to wait a short and specific amount of time without challenging behaviors. The child is

then granted the opportunity to go outside once they have met the target behaviors.

- The child will only be released from an activity, given a preferred item, or given attention if the child continues to participate in a specified activity for a prespecified amount of time or completes a prespecified task without engaging in challenging behavior.

### Who would benefit from implementing the tolerance for delay of reinforcement strategy?

- Teaching a tolerance for delay of reinforcement is useful when children engage in challenging behavior to —
  - » Escape or avoid a task.
  - » Obtain desired objects/activities.
  - » Obtain or maintain attention.

### When should I use Tolerance for Delay of Reinforcement as an intervention strategy?

- This strategy may be used to address challenging behaviors produced to —
  - » Escape/avoid a task: Rachel runs from the toy area after putting away three toys but before finishing the task.
  - » Obtain desired objects/activities: Karen engages in challenging behavior (i.e., tantrum) each time she requests a toy and it is not available to access.
  - » Obtain/maintain attention: Jason acts aggressively toward his peers when left to engage in an activity independently without adult attention.

### How do I implement a tolerance for delay of reinforcement as an intervention strategy?

- First, conduct a Functional Behavioral Assessment to determine the function

of the challenging behavior. If the function is to escape/avoid a task, obtain a desired object or activity, or obtain or maintain attention, then implementing a Tolerance for Delay of Reinforcement would be appropriate.

- Choose a specific activity or time of day to begin to implement this strategy. Pick a time when you know the challenging behavior generally occurs.
- Decide whether the child will need to wait for a specific amount of time or participate in a specific activity in order to receive the reinforcer.
- It is important to decide ahead of time what you are expecting the child to do. The child must understand what is expected of them in order to receive the reinforcer. If you need a child to wait, make sure it is for a short and specific amount of time. If he/she needs to participate in an activity, make it clear exactly what they will need to do in order to receive the reinforcer. Keep the child's developmental level in mind and be realistic about the child's current abilities. It is better to work incrementally in small steps helping the student to achieve success rather than in large steps that may set the child up for failure. Given that you are either asking for the child to wait for a specific time or you are asking them to complete a certain activity, this intervention is comprised of two different cues: a time-related delay cue and a task-related delay cue.

### What are delay cues?

- A delay cue in general is a verbal, gestural, or graphic signal given to the child to indicate that participation in the task is about to be terminated or a preferred item/event is about to be delivered, contingent on the absence of challenging behavior.
- A time-related delay cue communicates that reinforcement will be delivered contingent on refraining from engaging in challenging behavior for a period of time. The period of time can be specific such as We'll be done in 3 minutes or indefinite such as We'll be done soon. In early childhood settings, it is preferable for the period of time to be brief and specific. Using a bell timer, a sand timer, or other audio or visual cues is helpful to make the concept of time more concrete for the young learner.
- A task-related delay cue communicates that reinforcement will be delivered contingent on a certain amount of task engagement with no challenging behavior. For example, Sing one more song may be used to let Amanda know that she will be allowed to leave circle if she sings one more song. In early childhood, it is preferable if the chosen task is initially easily accomplished by the child to build success. The tasks can be incrementally increased to increase the time the student is engaged in the specified activity.

### What is a release cue?

- A release cue is a verbal, gestural, or graphic signal to indicate the delivery or onset of reinforcement. When the child has complied and met the task demands, it is important to have a cue to let them know that they will be receiving their reinforcer. Examples of release cues include saying "We're done" when the child has completed the activity or "Here it is" when a desired item is delivered.
- It is important to remember that both delay cues and release cues should be chosen based on the child's comprehension and the specific activity.

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Early Childhood Behavior Project:  
[slhslinux.cla.umn.edu](http://slhslinux.cla.umn.edu)