

Module: Extinction

Overview of Extinction

Sullivan, L., & Bogin, J. (2010). *Overview of extinction*. Sacramento: CA. National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, M.I.N.D. Institute. University of California at Davis Medical School.

Extinction is a strategy based on applied behavior analysis that is used to reduce or eliminate unwanted behavior. Extinction involves withdrawing or terminating the positive reinforcer that maintains an inappropriate interfering behavior. This withdrawal results in the stopping or extinction of behavior. The interfering behavior is likely to increase in frequency and intensity (extinction burst) before it is extinguished as the learner seeks to elicit the reinforcers previously provided. Extinction is often used with differential reinforcement to increase appropriate behaviors while discouraging the use of inappropriate behaviors.

Evidence

Extinction procedures meet the criteria for an evidence-based practice with four single subject and one group design studies. The evidence supports the use of extinction procedures with preschool, elementary, and middle school ages.

With what ages is extinction effective?

Extinction can be used effectively with children and youth in early childhood, elementary, and middle school settings.

What skills or intervention goals can be addressed by extinction?

Extinction procedures are most commonly used to reduce challenging or interfering behaviors. Within the articles that comprise the evidence base, extinction has been used to successfully reduce interfering behaviors (disruptive or restricted behaviors that interfere with optimal development, learning, and/or achievement).

In what settings can extinction be effectively used?

Extinction procedures should only be used after other more positive interventions have been tried and shown not to work. Extinction procedures should only be used by an individual who is familiar with the learner and who can create a plan for dealing with an extinction burst should the behaviors get worse.

Evidence Base

The studies cited in this section document that this practice meets the NPDC on ASD's criteria for an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist that were not included.

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Preschool

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Elementary and Middle School

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Selected Additional References

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