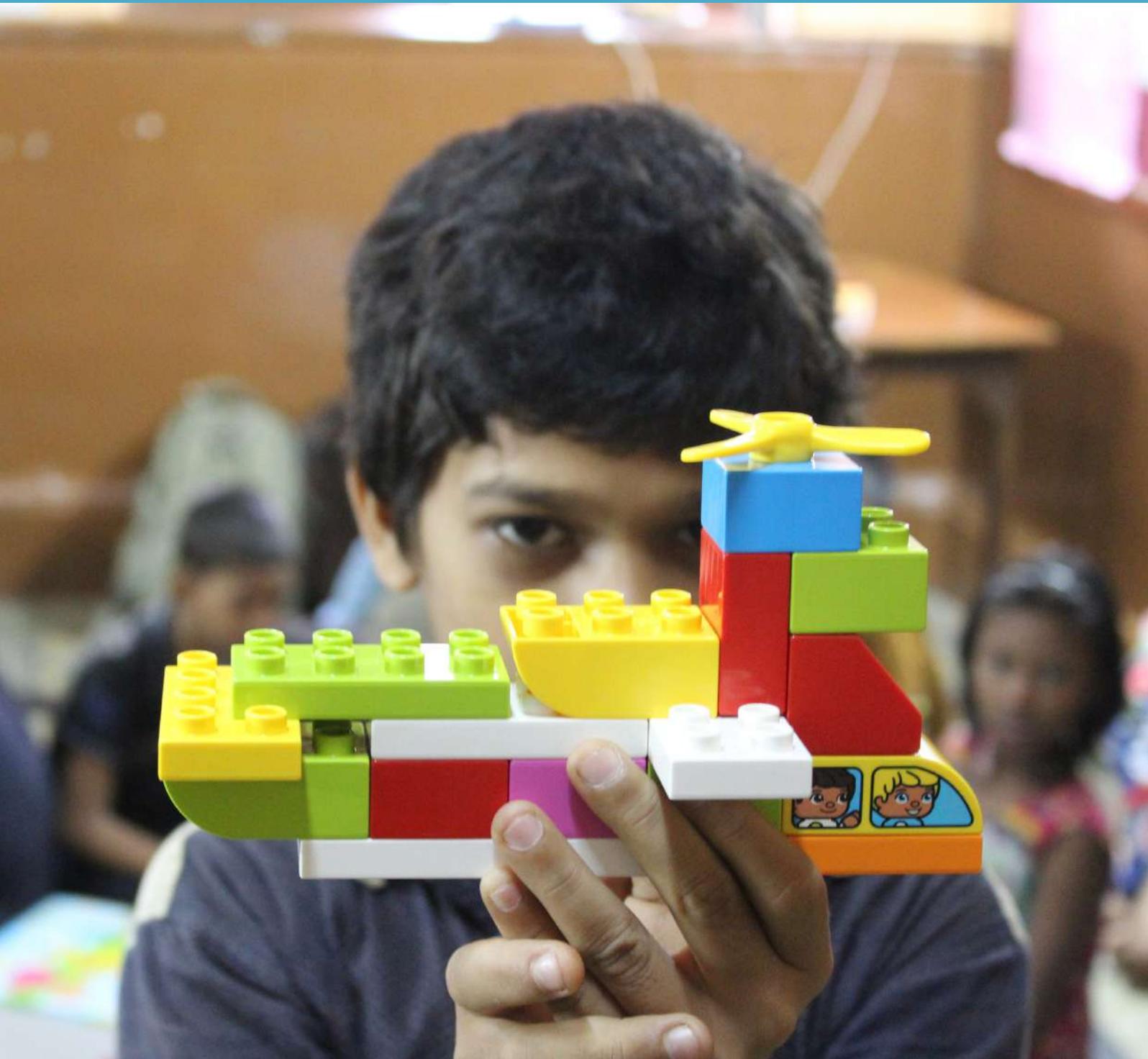




BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION AT PRERANA



B. F. Skinner is regarded as the father of Operant Conditioning.



Operant conditioning is a learning process through which the strength of a behaviour is modified by reinforcement or punishment. Behaviour followed by pleasant consequences, which is more likely to be repeated and behaviour followed by unpleasant consequences is less likely to be repeated.

Reinforcement can be positive and negative. Positive reinforcement would strengthen a behaviour due to its pleasurable consequence. For example, if a teacher gives you a hand shake each time you complete your homework (i.e. a positive gesture) you will be more likely to repeat this behaviour in the future, thus strengthening the behaviour of completing your homework.

The removal of an unpleasant reinforcer can also strengthen behaviour. This is known as negative reinforcement because it is the removal of an adverse stimulus which is 'rewarding' to the person. Negative reinforcement strengthens behaviour because it stops or removes an unpleasant experience.

For example, if you do not complete your homework, you will not be allowed to play in the ground during recess, but if you complete your homework you will be allowed to play on the ground. In other words, behaviour which is reinforced tends to be repeated (i.e. strengthened); behaviour which is not reinforced tends to die out or be extinguished (i.e. weakened).

A simple way to shape behaviour is to provide feedback on learner performance, for eg. compliments, approval, encouragement, and affirmation. A variable-ratio produces the highest response rate for students learning a new task because behaviour is reinforced after an unpredictable number of responses. For eg. The first time the behaviour is reinforced after five responses and the second time simply after three responses.

The team at Prerana began utilizing behavioural modification or behavioural reinforcements techniques from the year 2000. Prerana has been working with children for the last three decades and have observed numerous behaviour concerns among children. Thus, using behaviour modification techniques or behavioural reinforcements helped in addressing these behavioural concerns.

Some children after collecting certain number of stars enjoy various privileges such as:

- Get to choose their favourite TV Program
- Enjoys a special fruit, the other children also get to eat the fruits chosen by that particular child
- The child who has maximum stars will be selected first for exposure visits, picnics and activities
- The child gets to read story books of their choice
- The child takes up leaderships responsibilities



Children are given gifts/rewards that stand out from the items as part of their daily requirements or as a part of the standards of care and protection that are provided as per the organization's policy. Some rewards given are colourful towels, napkins, fancy belts, T-shirts etc.

On the other hand, children also receive positive punishments/negative reinforcements for the undesirable behaviour.

Negative punishments in Prerana are nothing but taking away some of the privileges which they enjoy at the centre. In such cases, they won't be permitted to watch T.V or won't be permitted to play games etc.

Children are mostly aware of the consequences of the undesirable behaviour they exhibit. Negative punishment is taking away pleasant privileges after undesirable behaviour. For example, a child might not be allowed to attend an exposure visit (this is done only if this indicator was announced much in advance); Children are given to memorize spellings of words (not more than 5 spellings), some are also asked to write them five times; as well as recite multiplication tables under the supervision of a teacher as one of the positive punishments.

We started applying behavioural modification techniques post which in some cases we saw success to great extent in modifying the children's behaviour and in some cases it took longer than we expected.



The term, 'behaviour modification', is based on the principle that rewarding appropriate behaviour is more effective than punishing inappropriate behaviour. Since children at the early childhood phase of life are not cognitively developed enough to understand the concept of consequence, and due to their short attention span, it's better to reward good behaviour as immediately as one can.

One needs to encourage the children to have desirable behaviour and discourage them for undesirable behaviour or utilize positive and negative reinforcements. There is a need to have a balanced approach, in this connection.

Rewarding an appropriate as well as addressing inappropriate behaviours are equally crucial. For positive reinforcement/desired behaviour, a rewarding system called Star Systems is devised/utilized at Prerana.

At the beginning of the month, we display the gifts that the children will receive for positive behaviour. Gifts are discussed with children and their suggestions for the same are also sought. We also share with the children about the budget for the gifts. Children are conveyed that not always one will get gifts that were solicited by them and are explained the reasons for the same.

Following behaviours are rewarded under the star system:

- Follow the rules at NCC and study class
- Be Punctual
- Attend school regularly
- Wear neat and tidy clothes
- Maintain personal hygiene
- Regularly study at study class and at school
- Respects elders
- Do no use cuss words
- Not to get physically violent as a response to other children
- Team work/ Group work

We noticed over the years that the behaviour modification techniques for children when applied by the staff or teachers, replace the undesirable behaviour of the children with preferred behaviour. In Prerana we also think, it is very important to let the child know whether he or she is improving or failing in terms of his behaviour. During the individual meetings with the child, the Case Worker gives feedback to the child on their behaviour and areas of improvement. These meetings are other than the ones taken by the counsellor.

Each caregiver/staff at Prerana, keeps reminding the children that they have the capability to bring about changes in their behaviour. We ensure that the caregivers/staff are very encouraging to the child when he or she behaves positively. Praising the child generously and rewarding him/her as and when required is practised at Prerana. This kind of response makes the children highly enthusiastic and they become willing to change their behaviour.

We firmly believe that there are no bad children - there are only bad choices and undesirable behaviour. We the caregivers/staff need to help each child learn how to deal with and come up with a better solution for those choices.

| Star System - Rewarding pattern | |
|---|--|
|  | 1 x  |
|  | 6 x  |
|  | 12 x  |
|  | 24 x  |

Star System pattern used for behaviour modification

Each child is given 1-star sheet, that belongs to them. They have to take responsibility of that paper. If they lose that paper, then they will lose all the stars. This creates responsibility among children.

Children are excited about the star system. They always look forward to getting stars. There is healthy competition among children for the same. Children are honest, they do not add stars on their own on the chart. They wait for teachers and the staff to give them stars. If children disagree, then there is always room for discussion.



Please note: This document is a work in progress however we are also seeking suggestions from the readers so that we can further strengthen the system as well as our protocol.

Reference:

- www.verywellfamily.com/ten-ways-to-improve-your-childs-behaviour-3105241
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- <https://www.simplypsychology.org/operant-conditioning.html>
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