

Introduction

The first step in promoting new behavior is getting the behavior to occur so that it can be reinforced with praise, feedback, or other things the person values. One important way to initiate new behavior is to prompt it. Most people are familiar with the use of instructions, directions, and written reminders to prompt new behavior. However, behavioral research has documented ways of making prompts work better at guiding behavior that teachers, parents, coaches, managers, and administrators want to promote. Of course, once the behavior occurs, it is necessary to reinforce or select it so that it continues to occur in the absence of prompts. Readers are referred to other books in this series to learn how to use praise, feedback, and other reinforcers more effectively.

Although it is also possible to teach new behaviors by gradually reinforcing closer and closer approximations or shaping them, one has to be skillful to use this technique, and it can take a good deal of time. However, if a prompt is well crafted, it can establish the behavior very quickly and easily. This book presents a program designed to help instructors and students to become more skillful in using this powerful instructional tool.

How To Help Others Adapt to Change

Almost everybody becomes frustrated when having difficulty getting other people to change their behavior. It is natural for people to become somewhat frustrated when efforts to help children or employees to learn to become more responsible, considerate, or effective meet with repeated failure. It is necessary to remember that "old habits die hard" because there are many cues or stimuli supporting them. An individual may think, "Why can't my children [or employees] be more like me and change their behavior more easily?" However, that individual is likely to have as much trouble changing his or her own behavior as anybody else. For example, it is well established that most people have trouble changing their eating habits, quitting smoking, not putting things off to the last minute, and so on. In fact, the poor track record that people have fulfilling New Year's resolutions is almost legendary.

One reason why people find it hard to change behavior is that they encounter a familiar environment that contains many cues that guide them to do the things that they have done before. The trick in learning to do something different is to establish new control over behavior. When people tell you

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