



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

March 2024

Volume 12

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Focus of the month:
Punishment
- World Behavior Analysis
Day
- Use of ABA in everyday life
- Highlights of the month



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Learning from consequences

A case of punishment procedures

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The field of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) has continuously assessed and refined its practices based on empirical evidence and clinical experiences. ABA has been criticised for its use of *punishment procedures*, suggesting potential side effects as being harmful and not targeting the underlying cause. As practitioners answerable to professional boards such as the Behaviour Analyst Certification Board (BACB) (among others), with strict ethical guidelines, there is an emphasis on ethical and effective practices only. This writing will focus on how *punishment* is also a natural phenomenon that exists in environments around us and what should parents and caregivers be ensuring before and while their child is going through intervention.

Sarah stays up one hour late than her usual time (11 PM) before her first fast in Ramzan. She missed her Sehri and regrets sleeping one hour later. The next day, she does not sleep late and instead gets into bed 30 minutes early (9:30 PM). Sarah learned from the consequences of staying up late. In her case, the consequence was a ‘punishing event’ of missing her Sehri, which as a result changed her behaviour of spending more time staying up. A child who shouts at his friend might not be invited to his friend’s birthday party. The next time he thinks of shouting, he might speak in a different manner. There are numerous everyday examples of natural punishment. Applied Behaviour Analysis uses such learning principles to understand and shape behaviour that requires reduction. It is important to note, that according to code of ethics, contrived (not natural) punishment strategies should be used when all other learning strategies fail. The least intrusive and most effective intervention must be considered first. In addition, in therapy, punishment procedures should not be used alone without reinforcement procedures. A child who may ‘miss out’ a social interaction due to rude behaviour (punishment) will be given the opportunity to join in a social interaction by behaving kindly (reinforcement).

Punishment strategies, whether natural or contrived are not meant to be aversive to the learner.

The only right time to use punishment strategies are listed below:

1. When the behaviour is dangerous to the individual themselves or people around them	For example, self- injurious behaviours.
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	In this case, the punishment procedure is less harmful to the child (and others) than the actual behaviour itself.
2. When other intervention strategies have been inefficient	For example, the behaviour has been challenging for more than a year after other strategies have been tried.
3. When the behaviour must be reduced in a short duration of time, due to the severity of the behaviour.	For example, disruption in the classroom that affects everyone

Two clinical examples, where punishment procedures have been used to reduce behaviour are mentioned below:

<p>Case 1: A 13- year boy engaged in self-hitting of his head. His hitting behaviour was intense and led to hospital visitations. This behaviour not only brought distress to the boy, but also to his family members. Other strategies did not reduce the behaviour.</p>	Behaviour analyst implemented a positive-punishment procedure, where the boy was helped to wear a helmet to avoid his hitting to contact his head. As a result, the hitting behaviour reduced, and hospital visits stopped.
<p>Case 2: In social skills, <i>Zack</i> pushed <i>John</i> when he lost a game of tic tac toe against. <i>John</i> starts to cry because his arm hurts.</p>	Behaviour therapists implement a negative punishment procedure, where <i>Zack</i> is moved away from <i>John</i> for a couple of minutes. <i>Zack</i> is given the opportunity to apologise to <i>John</i> and say one kind statement about him before he plays another game.

**Names mentioned are fictitious*

The cases mentioned above reflects the use of punishment strategies for two behaviours of different intensity. They provide an example of how such strategies were necessary to implement to reduce harmful/ undesirable behaviour. It is also important to note, that assessments understanding the reason behind the behaviour were conducted prior to implementing the strategies.

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Such punishment strategies are efficient however ethical practices are not consistently happening in all kinds of therapy (not limited to ABA). Human behaviour occurs everywhere, and behaviour principles are used in all kinds of therapies. Therefore, it is important for parents and caregivers to ask practitioners questions about strategies being implemented with their children. Below are some important questions:

1. What type of punishment can naturally occur in the session?
2. What type of punishment, if any, will be implemented by the therapist?
3. Has an assessment been conducted to understand the reason behind the behaviour?
4. If my child's behaviour is harmful, how will the punishment strategy be implemented ethically?
5. Can I observe the session to see how the strategy is being implemented?
6. How will my child's preferences and individual needs be considered when using punishment procedures?

By discussing these questions and concerns with their therapist, parents can gain a better understanding of how punishment procedures may be used in therapy and make informed decisions about their child's intervention.

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World Behavior Analysis Day



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Use of Applied Behavior Analysis In Everyday Life



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The Different Ways We Use ABA in Our Daily Life



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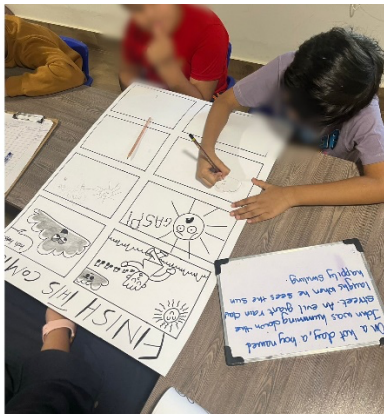
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Highlights of the month



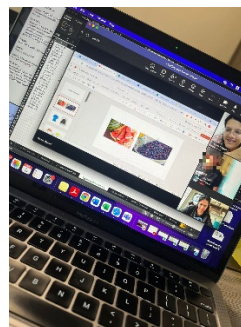
Group sessions taking place



Working on making a comic



A session with twins!



Online session