

Pairing

This module strategy is called Pairing, and if we're getting fancy we can call it stimulus pairing, but let's just call it pairing. It's a really simple thing to do; it's just about being thoughtful about it and using it to our advantage and using this to help us out, so what is Pairing?

The definition here is that you're just literally pairing two things together, so you have something that's reinforcing and something that's not, and we put them together; we pair them together, and the goal then is to transfer the reinforcing properties onto the thing that we don't like, so we're making un-fun things more fun. We're pairing it with something that is reinforcing for our kiddos that we know they like, that we know they're into to make that un-fun thing, that task, that chore, that thing that you nag all the time about more reinforcing and more fun.

Un-fun thing, pair it with that reinforcer, and it becomes not a big deal anymore. It probably won't happen on the first try. We pair it consistently over time, then those reinforcing properties transfer onto the un-fun thing, and it's not an issue anymore. It's no longer a big deal and a struggle, so what does this mean? How do we do this?

It sounds really basic, right? It sounds really simple, but it just takes some effort, and some thought to be effective and to be efficient and do this quickly and easily, so identify your problem activities. You probably know these off the top of your head. What is driving you bananas right now? What are the problems right now? Is it a certain routine? Is it getting out the door in the mornings? Is it the bedtime routine? Is it a time of day? Does it have to do with meals or self care, brushing teeth, bathing, these kinds of ... dressing yourself, or what is the problem? Where is that specific time of day, just like all the strategies you hear me say over and over, use it when you need it. When do you need it?

Then identify the good stuff. What're several things that your child does like? What are they into? What's reinforcing to them? We've talked in the past about how to find reinforcers, so if you need to go back to that and create a checklist and let them tell you what they like more than other things, try things out, observe them, what are they into now? What is reinforcing, and then pair the two things together: the un-fun thing with the reinforcer. Pair it together every single time. Every single time for a while, and then we fade out the reinforcer and hopefully the routine, the chore, the activity is no longer a struggle.

So, this is for little biddies. Your kiddo hates the changing table. I think everybody's probably been there at some point, even if you're having to remember back to when your kids were little. If your kiddo hates getting their diaper changed, well, we have to change their diapers, so how can we make this less painful for everybody? I think that every single parent has done the use your arm to try to hold the kiddo down safely while changing the diaper down here kind of thing. That's not fun for anybody. That is not reinforcing, that is not building rapport with your kiddo to have to tackle them onto a changing table to get their little booty clean, so how can we make it better?

What if your kiddo loves music, or if they love rhymes or something like that? Let me switch my example. They love music, so save their favorite songs for when you're changing their diapers, so if they're really into Old MacDonald, then don't sing Old MacDonald all day long. As soon as they're on the changing table, you bust out your best rendition of Old MacDonald had a farm and get them singing and

interacting with you, and you're now pairing that unpleasant activity of getting your diaper changed [inaudible 00:03:56] on the changing table with something reinforcing.

Eventually, you can sing other songs. You can talk to them, you can do other things on the changing table, and it will be less a struggle to get that diaper changed every time because you've now made the changing table itself, the experience of getting your diaper changed, a reinforcing thing. You've used the power of that Old MacDonald song or whatever it is that they're into to make it less problematic and more fun.

Okay, your kiddo hates green vegetables. This is a stretch, right? Everybody's kids eat peas all the time, but what if they love raspberries or other kinds of berries and sweet things? Save that favorite things, those raspberries, that blueberries, bananas, whatever their absolute favorite fruit is, save that to pair it with a green vegetable. Put both of them on the fork at the same time. Do it as a first in; first the green bean and then the raspberry. Somehow, make the green vegetable come with that favorite other thing, that favorite berry, cheese stick, whatever that is; something that you can pair together, but do it consistently. Don't get those berries out for breakfast and lunch and then at dinner time you expect to pair them with green beans. Well, they got them for free. They got them easily. It's not going to work as well. Save the really powerful stuff for when you need it, and if dinner time and green vegetables is a struggle, then pair it with something that they like; something that's yummy to them.

All right, what if your kiddo loves Paw Patrol, but they don't like chatting with you? They're not real social, and you're trying to increase those interactions. You want to say, "How was your day at school today?" You get nothing back. Well, let's work up to that. Let's pair that favorite interest or activity of Paw Patrol with the question asking, so ask about Paw Patrol. "Well, what happened in the episode? Well, what happens when ..." what are their names? "Ryder does this or that or Sky in her little helicopter ..." ask questions about Paw Patrol and their favorite characters. "Well, what would Ryder do in math class," or whatever it is. Eventually you toss in the questions about school. First you're building up that reinforcement of just answering mom's questions and having this dialogue after school is fun and pleasant and reinforcing because the reinforcing properties of that favorite interest or topic, this example was Paw Patrol, have now transferred onto the unpleasant thing, which was chatting with mom after school.

All right, what if your kiddo does not like playing with their sibling, but they do love playing video games? Save the video games as a sibling activity. We do it together, so we're pairing that really fun X-box time with brother time, and then you can also use it as a reinforcer, so earn it for being nice to your brother. You can use it in multiple ways, but the idea is to pair together the un-fun and the fun to make it all more reinforcing.

Any kiddo has to do a medical treatment. We did this when my own daughter needed breathing treatments. I have a good friend who's child needs breathing treatments every day. If you need to do physical therapy exercises every day, if you need to take medicines, any sort of extra chores, tasks that you have to do that are not always fun, pair it together with something else and make it more reinforcing and less of a dreaded thing, so kiddo loves Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, so we save Mickey for during the physical therapy, during the breathing treatment, at the doctor. We do it at the same time, so we pair that reinforcing property of Mickey with the doctor visits, and so the doctor is not a dreaded, horrific experience. Hopefully it never is, but for our kiddo it's more reinforcing and more fun if we have their favorite reinforcer and we pair them together.

Kiddo hates getting their nails clipped. We have to do it, or we're all going to get scratched, but they love being outside, so why don't we just do those little at home [inaudible 00:07:55] pedis outside? Being outside is an easy one, if it's not super cold or super hot; one extreme or the other, but being able to pair the outdoors with things is good for everybody.

Pair yourself, save one of your child's activities as something that you do together. Don't give demands during that time, so in ABA therapy this is what we do hopefully at the beginning of every single session, but every time you meet a new client if you're in ABA therapy, what would happen is that the therapist, the BCBA, the RBT, whatever you're going to call this person, pairs themselves with reinforcement, so if I'm a stranger and I want to work with a kid, I can't just start placing demands. I need to be reinforcing. I have to build that rapport, and so as a BCBA I do that by playing.

Play, play, play; pair myself with my favorite things, and so they find me reinforcing and not this mean lady who tells you to do things all the time. Sometimes as a parent we have to do that too. We have to stop and say, "You know, I haven't just played in a long time. I take care of all your needs. You should like me. I should be reinforcing," but sometimes we need to just stop and play without putting any demands. That means just playing, not, "You need to clean up your room. Did you do this earlier? What about this, what about that," asking all these questions. Those are demands because you're demanding a response when you ask questions, but just sit down and build something with legos quietly if they don't feel like chatting.

Just sit next to them and build. Color together. Whatever it is that your kiddo's into, just do it with them, and that builds up your relationship, and it helps to restore yourself as a reinforcer. You are their parent. You should be reinforcing to them. You are reinforcing to them, but sometimes we need to bust that power a little bit, and this is how you do it. This is use it when you need it. This is when you need it, when you find yourself in that bad place, when you're nagging and raising your voice and doing timeout or other punishments and these sorts of things. Pair yourself with that reinforcement. Really spending that quality time can help your attitude as a parent. It helps me a lot when I find myself going to that negative side of things, and how do you turn it back around? Just sit down and play with them a little while, and that alone can prevent some of the problems that have caused you to go in that bad place and break that cycle that you've found yourself in.

Save that good reinforcer for when you need it. Don't be giving it out all day long and then expect it to be really powerful when you want to pair it with the [inaudible 00:10:29] time that they're working on. You want to pair that favorite activity with something hard, and if they've had the favorite thing all day, why would they do the hard thing? Save it, use it when you need it. It'll go a lot faster for you. It'll be a lot more efficient and a lot more effective if you find something really powerful, something they're really into, they really like, and only give it when you're pairing it with a problem area.

If your child likes music, that's the easiest possible thing I can think of to pair, because you can sing at any time. You can yell at your phone if you have an Apple phone. You can yell, "hey, Siri!" And tell Siri to turn on some music of choice. You can play music, play music in the car, in the house. It's not something you need a lot of stuff for. The weather doesn't matter. Music is the absolute easiest thing, so think about all the different times you can use music. You can make up a song about tooth brushing. You can make up a song about tying your shoes. You don't have to make one up; you can just google one. They exist. If you don't know it already, ask a Kindergarten teacher; a preschool teacher. Use music. Dancing, singing, rhymes, little stories, things that you can just spit out of your mouth that you don't need stuff

for. If they're really into legos, well, now you're carrying around a gallon sized bag of legos all day for pairing.

That's difficult, so think about the stuff that they really like; talking about their favorite topic for older kiddos, talk about their favorite movie, learning some lines from their favorite shows or movies so you can come out with some movie quotes. Use those sorts of things to pair. Pair with the un-fun, make it more fun, do it consistently, and you'll see an increase in the desired behaviors and the decrease in the struggle and the nagging and the fighting.

Your takeaways: pairing with something reinforcing lessens the sting of the un-fun things. We all dread certain things. How can we make it less dreadful? How can we make it less of a problem and possibly even reinforcing in its own right so there's no longer a struggle over that in your home? Increase reinforcement instead of increasing the nagging, so if you find yourself saying the same thing, "Find your shoes, put your shoes on, put your shoes on," well, let's make up a song about shoes and let's make shoes fun and let's make it a game and a race, make it more fun. Make it fun, which sounds like a lot of work.

Honestly, it sounds like more work for me as the mom, but it's not in the long run. If I spend three minutes today thinking about how can I make shoes more fun, for the next few weeks I won't be nagging and I won't be arguing and I won't be frustrated about shoes, and then that's not an issue anymore, and then something else pops up that's an issue because that's our lives, and you take five minutes and you go, what I can pair this with? How can it get more fun, and then you do it and it's easier and it decreases the nagging, so that proactive, "What's something fun that my kid likes that I can pair this with to make this un-fun time more fun?" Because we're still going to do it. We've still got to do these activities and routines. Let's do it with less of a struggle and make everybody feel better about their day.

Always, always work on increasing reinforcement first before we resort to punishment. Before we jump straight to punishment, the answer is always increase those desired behaviors and in this case just increase reinforcing things. Just increase reinforcement across the board. Make the un-fun times more reinforcing to prevent those problems from ever happening in the first place.