

ABCs of ESDM

Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence 3 term sequence- for example:

Antecedent: child finds desired toy in hard-to-open container

Behavior: child hands container to adult and makes eye contact

Consequence: adult opens container and hands back

ABCs should be clear – it should be obvious what behavior the adult is trying to elicit, and reinforcement should be swift and clearly tied to the behavior.

Target behaviors are specified in the objectives. However, if the child performs a more advanced behavior than the target, then that would be reinforced. For instance, in the above example, if the child were to say “open”, this would be reinforced.

To maintain motivation, newer and harder skills should be interspersed with maintenance trials of previously mastered skills.

Reinforcement should be a natural part of the joint activity rather than an extrinsic, unrelated reinforcer. Social reinforcement should consist of the adult restating the child’s behavior with excitement and positive affect, e.g. saying “car! Want car!” and handing over the car, rather than using phrases like “good pointing”.

Prompting is essential to elicit new behaviors – but should be faded very quickly to avoid prompt dependency. In general the ESDM uses a least-to-most prompting hierarchy to foster spontaneity and independence, though this will depend on the specific teaching plan.

Shaping is a very important part of the ESDM approach. More value is placed on independence than accuracy. For example, if attempting to elicit imitation of an action in a song, the adult would reinforce a sloppy approximation and then shape it over time, rather than over-prompting to try to get a more accurate imitation.