**Un-training: Using Reinforcement to Get Rid of Behavior You Don't Want**

**Method 1:** "Shoot the animal."(This definitely works. You will never have to deal with that particular behavior in that particular subject again.)

**Method 2:** Punishment. (Everybody's favorite, in spite of the fact that it almost never really works.)

**Method 3:** Negative reinforcement. (Removing something unpleasant when a desired behavior occurs.)

**Method 4:** Extinction; letting the behavior go away by itself.

**Method 5:** Train an incompatible behavior. (This method is especially useful for athletes and pet owners.)

**Method 6:** Put the behavior on cue. (Then you never give the cue. This is the dolphin trainer's most elegant method of getting rid of unwanted behavior.)

**Method 7:** "Shape the absence"; reinforce anything and everything that is *not* the undesired behavior. (A kindly way to turn disagreeable relatives into agreeable relatives.)

**Method 8:** Change the motivation. (This is the fundamental and most kindly method of all.)



|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 1: "SHOOT THE ANIMAL"**Method 1 solves the problem in a way but may or may not be the method of choice in any given situation. |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Change roommates. |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | Shoot the animal. Sell it. Have its vocal cords cut by the vet. |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | Make them walk home. Make them take the bus. Get someone else to drive the car pool. |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | Divorce |
| Faulty tennis swing. | Stop playing tennis |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | Fire him or her |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | Never write any thank you notes. Then maybe people will stop giving you presents. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Keep the cat outdoors or get rid of it. |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | Get off the bus and take the next one. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | Say no and stick to it.  |

|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 2: PUNISHMENT**These are seldom effective and lose effect with repetition but are widely used. |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Yell and scold. Threaten to confiscate and throw away the clothes, or do so. |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | Go out and hit him or spray him with the hose when he barks. (N.B.: Dog will be so glad to see you, he'll probably "forgive" the punishment.) |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | Yell at them. Threaten. Turn around and smack them. |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | Start a fight. Burn the dinner. Sulk, scold, and cry. |
| Faulty tennis swing. | Curse, get mad, and criticize yourself every time you do it wrong. |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | Scold and criticize, preferably in front of others. Threaten to dock pay, or do so. |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | Punish yourself by postponing the task and feeling guilty at the same time. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Strike it and/or chase it out of the kitchen. |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | Obtain the driver's number, complain to the company, and try to get him or her transferred, reprimanded, or fired. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | Let the adult child move in but make life miserable for him or her. |

|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 3: NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT**Negative reinforcement may be effective and the method of choice in some situations. The car device described here works very well, especially if the children are too tired and cross to be amenable to alternatives such as playing games and singing songs (Method 5). |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Disconnect the TV or withhold dinner until the laundry is picked up.(Cease negative re-inforcer when compliance is obtained; reinforce even halfhearted efforts at first.) |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | Shine a strong light on doghouse when dog barks. Turn the light off when the dog stops barking. |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | When the decibel level meets the pain threshold, pull over and stop the car. Read a book. Ignore arguing about stopping; that's noise, too. Drive on when silence reigns. |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | Turn your back or leave the room briefly when the tone of his or her voice is disagreeable. Return and give your attention at once when the voice is silent or normal. |
| Faulty tennis swing. | Have a coach or bystander verbally correct the bad swing ("Ah-ah-ah," or "No!") in mid-swing each time you do it. Develop another swing that shuts off the correction. |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | Tighten supervision and rebuke each instance in which work falls below par. |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | Negative reinforcement comes automatically from friends and loved ones. Aunt Alice will let you know how worried she is that you never got the scarf, and your family will let you know that you ought to write Aunt Alice. The information will be delivered with definite aversive overtones. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Put cellophane tape, sticky side up, on the kitchen table. |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | Stand in the door or near the driver so he can't drive on until you move. Move when he stops talking, even for an instant. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | Let the adult child come back, but charge him or her exactly what you would charge a stranger for rent, food, and any additional services such as laundry or babysitting. Make it worthwhile financially to move on. |

|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 4: EXTINCTION**Method 4 is not useful for getting rid of well-learned, self-rewarding behavior patterns. It is good, however, for whining, sulking, or teasing. Even small children can learn—and are gratified to discover—that they can stop older children from teasing them merely by not reacting in any way, good or bad. |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Wait for him or her to grow up. |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | This behavior is self-reinforcing and seldom extinguishes spontaneously. |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | A certain amount of noise is natural and harmless; let it be, they'll get tired of it. |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | See to it that his or her harsh words have no results, either good or bad. |
| Faulty tennis swing. | Work on other strokes, footwork, and so on, and try to let the specific error die down from lack of concentrating on it. |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | If the misbehavior is a way of getting attention, remove the attention; shirking, however, may be self-reinforcing. |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | This behavior generally extinguishes with age. Life becomes so full of onerous chores such as paying bills and doing taxes that mere thank-you notes become relaxation by comparison. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Ignore the behavior. It will not go away, but you may succeed in extinguishing your own objections to cat hair in your food. |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | Ignore the driver, pay your fare, and forget it. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | Accept it as a temporary measure and expect that the adult child will move out as soon as finances improve or the present crisis is over. |

|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 5: TRAIN AN INCOMPATIBLE BEHAVIOR**Sensible people often employ this method. Singing and playing games in the car relieves parents as well as children from boredom. Diversion, distraction, and pleasant occupations are good alternatives during many tense moments. |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Buy a laundry hamper and reward the roommate for placing laundry in it. Wash laundry together, making it a social occasion, when the hamper is full. Laundry care is incompatible with laundry neglect. |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | Train it to lie down on command; dogs, like most of us, seldom bark lying down. Yell the command out the window or rig an intercom to the doghouse. Reward with praise. |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | Sing songs, tell stories, play games: "Ghost," "I Spy with My Little Eye," "20 Questions," and so on. Even three-year-olds can sing simple Krishna songs. Incompatible with squabbling and yelling. |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | Institute some pleasant activity on homecoming, incompatible with grouching, such as playing with the children or working on a hobby. Thirty minutes of total privacy is often good. Spouse may need time to unwind before switching to family life. |
| Faulty tennis swing. | Train an alternative tennis swing from scratch. |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | Order him or her to work quicker or harder on a specific task; watch, and praise the job on completion. |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | Train some replacement behavior: If someone sends you a check, write a few grateful words on the back as you endorse it—the bank will take care of the rest. For other kinds of presents, call the sender that very night and say thank you. Then you will never have to write a letter. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Train the cat to sit on a kitchen chair for petting and food reward. An eager or hungry cat may hit that chair so hard it slides halfway across the kitchen, but still the cat is where you want it, not on the table. |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | Respond to snarls or bullying with eye contact, a civil smile, and an appropriate social remark—"Good morning"—or, if the driver is really scolding you, with sympathy: "You must have a hard job!" This sometimes prompts courtesy in return, which you can then reinforce. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | Help him or her to find another place to live, even if you have to pay for it at first. |

|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 6: PUT THE BEHAVIOR ON CUE**It doesn't seem logical that this method would work, but it can be startlingly effective, and sometimes almost an instantaneous cure. |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Have a laundry fight. See how big a mess you can both make in ten minutes. (Effective; sometimes the untidy person, seeing what a big mess looks like, is then able to recognize and tidy up smaller messes—one shirt, two socks—that may still bother you but were previously not perceived as messy by the roommate.) |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | Train the dog to bark on command "Speak!" for a food reward. In the absence of the command, no point in barking. |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | Put noisemaking under stimulus control |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | Set a time and a signal for grouching; sit down for ten minutes, say, starting at 5 P.M. During that period reinforce all complaining with your full attention and sympathy. Ignore complaining before and after. |
| Faulty tennis swing. | If you told yourself to hit the ball wrong, and learned to do it on purpose, would the fault tend to extinguish when you did not give the command? It might. |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | Order up goof-off time. This was an amazingly effective technique used by the president of an ad agency where I once worked. |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | Buy a memo pad, notepaper, stamps, a pen, an address book, and a red box. Put the supplies inside the box. When you get a present, write the donor's name on the memo pad, put it on the box, put the red box on your pillow or dinner plate, and don't sleep or eat until you've obeyed the cue of the box and written the letter and sealed, stamped, and mailed it. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Train it to jump up on the table on cue and also to jump down on cue (this impresses guests). You can then shape the length of time it has to wait for the cue (all day, eventually). |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | Putting this behavior on cue is not recommended. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | As soon as adult children leave home for good, invite them back for visits, making it clear that they should come only by your invitation. Then don't invite them to move in. |

|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 7: SHAPE THE ABSENCE OF UNWANTED BEHAVIORS**This takes some conscious effort over a period of time, but is often the best way to change deeply ingrained behavior. |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Have special sweets or invite over good friends whenever quarters are tidy or roommate does the laundry. |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | Go out and reward him now and then at night when he has been quiet for ten, twenty minutes, an hour, and so on. |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | Wait for a quiet time and then say "You all have been so quiet today that I'm going to stop at Govinda’s." (Say this right near Govinda's so you can keep your promise promptly, before they get noisy again!) |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | Think up some good re-inforcers and surprise him or her with them whenever the mood does happen to be pleasant. |
| Faulty tennis swing. | Ignore bad shots, and praise yourself for good ones. (This *really* works.) |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | Praise the hell out of him for any job actually done satisfactorily. (You do not have to keep this up for a lifetime, just long enough to establish the new trend.) |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | Treat yourself to a something you really like any time you get a present and promptly write and mail the thank-you note. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Rewarding the cat for periods of staying off the table is practical only if you keep the kitchen door closed when you're not home so the cat can't indulge in the behavior by itself. |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | If you run into the same bus driver on your route every day, a pleasant "good morning" or even a flower, or a soft drink, when he or she is not being rude, should lead to improvement in a week or two. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | Reinforce adult children for living away from home when they are doing so. Don't criticize their housekeeping, choice of apartment, decor, or taste in friends, or they may decide you're right, your house is a better place to live. |

|  |
| --- |
| **SAMPLES OF METHOD 8: CHANGE THE MOTIVATION**If you can find a way to do it, this method always works and is the best of all. |
| **BEHAVIOR**  | **APPROACH** |
| Roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place. | Hire a maid or housekeeper to tidy up and do laundry, so neither you nor the roommate has to cope. This may be the best solution if you are married to this roommate and you both work. Or the messy person could shape the tidy one to be more casual. |
| Dog in yard barks all night. | Barking dogs are lonely, frightened, and bored. Give exercise and attention by day so that the dog is tired and sleepy at night, or provide another dog to sleep with at night for company. Or bring dog inside. |
| Kids too noisy in the car. | Escalation of noise and conflict is often due to hunger and fatigue. Provide juice, fruit and cookies, and pillows for comfortable lounging on home-from-school trips. On long journeys all of the above plus ten minutes per hour of stopping and running around outdoors (good for parents too). |
| Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood. | Encourage a job change. Feed cheese and crackers or a cup of hot soup right at the door if hunger and fatigue are the motivation. If stress is the problem, some kirtana, fresh air and exercise, may be appropriate. |
| Faulty tennis swing. | Stop trying to beat the world by winning on the tennis court. Play for fun. (Not applicable to world-class tennis players—or is it?) |
| Shirking or lazy employee. | Pay for work done, not for hours put in. Task-oriented payment is often very effective with non-Western employees. It's the barn-raising principle; everyone works like mad until the known task is completed, and then everyone can leave. Hollywood movies are made this way. |
| Hating to write thank-you notes. | We dislike this task because it is a behavior chain (see Method 6) and therefore hard to start, especially since there is no good reinforcement at the end (we already have the present!). We also sometimes put it off because we think we have to write a good, clever, or perfect letter. Not true: All the recipient needs to know is that you are grateful for his or her symbol of affection. Fancy words in a thank-you note are no more important than fancy penmanship on a check: On-time delivery is what counts. |
| Cat gets on the kitchen table. | Why do cats get on the table? (1) To look for food, so put the food away; (2) cats like to lounge in a high place where they can see what's going on. Arrange a shelf or a pedestal higher than the tabletop, close enough so you can pet the cat, and offering a good view of the kitchen, and the cat may well prefer it. |
| Surly bus driver is rude to you and makes you mad. | Avoid being snarled at on buses by doing *your* job: Have your change ready, know your destination, don't block the aisle, don't mumble questions, try to be sympathetic about traffic tie-ups, and so on. Bus drivers get crabby because bus riders can be such a pain. |
| An adult offspring who you think should be self-sufficient wants to move back in with you. | Adults with friends, self-esteem, and a purpose in life, some kind of work, and a roof over their heads usually don't want to live with or on their parents. Help your kids find the first three as they are growing up, and they'll usually take care of the job and the roof on their own. Then you can all stay friends. |