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## GENERALIZATION: USE AND TRANSFER OF SKILLS

Generalization is the continued use and transfer of learned skills learned in counseling to a variety of situations. **Maintenance** refers to a youth's long term use of learned skills. **Transfer** refers to the youth's ability to use the learned skills in varying ways in different situations and settings. With the help of a youth's treatment team (counselor, advocate, probation officer, family, etc) skills can be maintained and transferred using Behavioral Modification strategies such as **positive/negative reinforcement, punishment, prompting, and role playing/practicing**.

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### MAINTENANCE OF SKILLS

Prior to both maintenance and transfer of skills, the treatment team should ensure the youth understands the principles of the skill and know the steps to the skill being taught. This can be assessed by giving quizzes or tests of skills and concepts being taught.

#### Prompting

As new skills are first being learned, prompts may be necessary to assist in a youth's use of new skills. As the youth becomes more practiced, the treatment team can employ the strategy **fading prompts**, which involves gradually removing prompts, suggestions, or reminders and allowing the youth to manage their own behavior.

#### Reinforcing

After skills are learned, reinforcers (and punishers if necessary) should be planned by the youth and the youth's treatment team. The treatment team should ensure the reinforcers are *actually* reinforcing to each individual youth, as something that is reinforcing to one youth many not be reinforcing to another youth (reinforcers can be tangible or "natural" such as, verbal praise, smiles, etc). Once reinforcers are chosen a **schedule of reinforcement** should be designed. Schedule of reinforcement is simply planning "what" (i.e., the new skill) will be reinforced and "when" it will be reinforced. The schedules of reinforcement discussed below are intended to be examples but is not a comprehensive list of all possibilities.

**Continuous Reinforcement-** Providing a reinforcer every time the youth performs the skill.

**Intermittent Reinforcement-** Providing a reinforcer for some, but not each time the youth performs the skill.

**Thinning Reinforcement-** Beginning with continuous reinforcement, then gradually decreasing to intermittent reinforcement, to sparse or infrequent reinforcement.

**Delaying Reinforcement-** Is more complex and can involve a variety of strategies. First, this can include increasing size or complexity of skill prior to reinforcing. Or, adding a time delay between response and reinforcement, which is not recommended until youth is adept in using the skill.

**Nonreinforcement in the Natural Environment-** This is done by teaching youth to use self-reinforcement and teaching skills in coping with nonreinforcement. The previous reinforcement of the skill should naturally assist in maintaining the skill.

**Programming for Reinforcement in the Natural Environment-** This can be accomplished by training individuals in the youth's life to assist in prompting skills and providing reinforcers. This might include informing parents, schools, or other institutions, of what skill is being taught, why skill is being taught, how skill is to be practiced, and encouraging those involved parties to prompt and reinforce the skills.

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### **Booster Sessions**

Providing booster sessions on the skills learned may be beneficial in reminding the youth of the skill, providing additional practice, answering questions or assisting with problems that have arisen, or providing support for the youth.

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### **TRANSFER OF SKILLS**

All of the strategies listed above the “maintenance” section can be applied when transfer a learned skill to a new situation or setting. Below are strategies that may be helpful in assisting the youth transfer the learned skills.

**Overlearning-** Involves practicing a skill with a counselor until the youth is using the skill correctly. Additionally, once the skill is correctly implemented the youth should repeat the skill multiple times, one or two successes will not suffice.

**Stimulus Variability-** After the skill is initially taught, the counselor should vary the situations and settings in which the skill is practiced.

**Identical Elements-** The skill should be practiced in setting and situations that resemble the youths “real life” (people, places, events) as much as possible. For example, if youth fights with parents, practice the skills while sitting at a table and/or with the youth’s parents.

### **Reference:**

Goldstein, A.P., Glick, B., & Gibbs, J.C. (1998) Aggression Replacement Training. Revised Edition. Research Press, Champaign, Illinois.