Scheduling Reinforcement

**Consistent**
Reinforcement is delivered at a consistent interval or consistent ratio (e.g., after every correct response or after every two correct responses). This schedule is effective in getting a new behavior established; however, if discontinued, the behavior will typically decrease rapidly.

**Intermittent**
Reinforcement is delivered at random intervals. This is the strongest schedule and is most effective in maintaining behavior over long periods of time.

**How Long: Combining Strength and Schedule for Reinforcement**
There is no time limit on reinforcement. Reinforcement is given as long as the student needs it. Concentrate on type, age-appropriateness, place, timing, and self-administration of reinforcement.

1. What type of reinforcement is effective for this student? Is it readily available in the environment? Is there a way to ask for it?

2. Check the age-appropriateness of the things that reinforce the student. Some things make the student appear immature. While these are useful at this time, you’ll want to systematically teach the student to enjoy things that are age-appropriate. Be sure to combine a very strong, currently preferred reinforcer with the new and unfamiliar reinforcer during the initial instruction.

3. When reinforcements are age-inappropriate, be very aware of when and where they are used. Preferred activities may be postponed until the student is in an appropriate place or when people who might misunderstand are not around. Waiting for a time and a place can be instructed systematically using the same procedures used for teaching waiting. Use visual cuing to help the student predict when and where the favorite reinforcer will be received.

4. Can the student self-administer the reinforcement when acting appropriately? For true independence, teach the student to self-apply the reinforcement. First, you instruct the behavior directly and administer the reinforcers. Once the student can act appropriately on a consistent basis, instruct the student to self-apply the reinforcer. At that time, the adult reinforces the student for correctly reinforcing, not for acting appropriately. Checklists, graphs, and tokens work very well. Your job is to take yourself out of the direct monitoring of the behavior. Rather, monitor the student’s ability to self-monitor. Ultimately, the self-monitoring activity will become highly reinforcing to the student.