

Priming Strategies Part 2 – Self Regulation

Private Behaviors

Instructor:

Private behaviors are intrinsically motivating. One crucial aspect in redirecting them is identifying additional motivation to redirect the behavior. The second aspect is defining where the behavior can occur.

Part of the priming process requires increasing extrinsic motivation for the absence of that behavior in a public setting. Does the student want to be accepted? Does the student want friends? How can I tie this to the absence of the private behavior in specific settings? If these are not important to the person, other extrinsic reinforcement will be necessary (strong individualized reinforcers for specific intervals in which the target behavior does not occur).

Does the student need to define private vs. public behaviors? Consider creating a way of visually representing 'private' vs. 'public' behaviors. Do you make a 2-column list of private vs. public behaviors? Do you create a card set for the student to sort with teacher support? Each card in the set may have a description of a behavior and the student sorts each card into public vs. private behavior piles.

Does the student need to better understand how certain private behaviors are seen by others? Consider the use of a video story to clarify how others see this behavior in public.

Consider the use of a 5-point scale to show level 1 – hands away from genital area vs. level 3 – touching pants near genital area in public vs. level 4 – rubbing genitals in public vs. level 5 (Indecent Exposure) – masturbating in public setting.

Consider the value of a behavior contract or plan in which the student agrees to use certain strategies to redirect his own behaviors and in which the student earns additional reinforcement for the absence of the target private behavior.

Repetitive Behaviors

Instructor: Priming with regard to repetitive behaviors will often require a discussion of the individual's self-recognition of the behavior.

Does the individual even know that he or she is engaging in this behavior?

In this process of self-labeling, does the individual know how the repetitive behavior makes him feel? In other words, does it serve some function for the individual (self-regulating, expression of excitement, coping strategy in dealing with stress, etc.)?

The third step may be to then identify 'the side effects' of this repetitive behavior. In other words, do others have difficulty with his repetitive behavior? How do others view the behavior? For some, this may be unimportant. For some, it will not be worth it to change the behavior. Many individuals with ASD report that they enjoy engaging in repetitive behaviors and that it is part of what makes them happy. The instructor must sensitively address whether it really is important to attempt redirection of the behavior.

However, if the student and the instructor agree, the fourth step is to define both what the student can do instead in public and when he or she gets to engage in the repetitive behavior.

These four points may be the basis of a social narrative or of a video model that is created to support the student in self-recognition and in self-redirection of repetitive behaviors.

Priming here may involve:

- 1) self-labeling of the behavior**
- 2) identifying its value**
- 3) identifying how it is viewed (with a focus on what is important to the student)**
- 4) identifying what to do instead and/or when it is okay to engage in the behavior.**

Perseverative questioning

Instructor:

In priming with a student who repeats questions, it is again important to understand why the student engages in this perseveration. Does the student want to engage in contact with specific people and does not have multiple ways of initiating that interaction? This is quite often the case. The student wants contact and needs practice in bringing up varied topics to sustain the attention of a favored person. Sometimes, the perseverative topic or questions are a favored topic and therefore this type of “conversation” needs a time and a place. Sometimes, the student engages in perseverative questioning around a subject that causes anxiety and the student asks questions to cope with that anxiety or lack of resolve with the response or the situation. Make sure in priming that you address the function of the behavior.

Consider developing a conversation topics card set that supports the student in bringing up and talking about other subjects with favored individuals.

Consider using the schedule to set up specific times of day during which the student gets to talk about a favored (perseverative) topic.

Consider visually clarifying on the schedule or on a written cue in the student’s environment the answer to a perseverative question. In this way, the instructor and others can point to the answer on the visual cue instead of verbally responding again and again.

Handling the need for things to be “just right”

Instructor:

In priming with the student who feels the need to have things “just right” or “perfect,” it is important to understand that this is often attributed to underlying anxiety issues. It will be important for you to teach the student to identify the thoughts (e.g. obsessions, and inability to focus on the task at hand) and physiological responses (e.g. tension in the body, increased heart rate) that often precede the “just right” behaviors (e.g. excessively organizing materials, arranging items in an exact way, attempting to remove a permanent mark on the paper, closing or opening a door a set number of times).

Consider developing a visual scale to support identification of the feelings, thoughts, and/or physiological responses that accompany these behaviors.

Devise visual relaxation cards or coping cards that the student might be able to use when he experiences anxiety about not being able to “fix” something.

Consider the use of a social narrative to help the student understand how his behavior negatively impacts his own participation in school or work, and how his behavior also impacts others.

Consider the use of a visual schedule that indicates when a certain compulsion might be able to take place, or some form of behavior contract that places limitations on the “just right” behaviors.