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Reinforcement Strategies:

An introduction to the principles of reinforcement

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Target Audience:

- Anyone involved in implementing a Behavioral Support or Skill Building Plan

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Objectives:

Training participants will be able to:

1. Define reinforcement in a behavioral science context
2. Link behavioral function to reinforcement history
3. Identify the qualities that exist in effective reinforcers
4. Analyze intervention plans to determine if there are effective reinforcement/consequence strategies

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Disclaimer

- This training is not meant to be a replacement for any regulations, program requirements, etc.. but meant to re-frame an often misunderstood but important topic in the field of behavioral supports and services.

Assumptions of Behavior

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- Everything a person or living thing does is behavior
- Most behaviors are learned
- Behavior is communication
- Behavior is an individual's best attempt at getting what they want or need out of a situation
- Behavior serves a function
- If challenging behavior is occurring with regularity..... it is being reinforced

Behavioral Function

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- Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)
  - An FBA should not be a "one time" thing
    - Should be conducted for every concerning behavior
    - Should be re-evaluated when there are changes to behavior and or context in which behavior is occurring
  - A quality FBA should:
    - Demonstrate there is enough evidence to hypothesize a function of a challenging behavior
      - If not, make recommendations to rule out medical or mental health causation before continuing.
    - Tell us the ABC's of the targeted behavior…

ABC's of Behavior

(Antecedent)

- Describes the environment or situational context the challenging behavior is occurring in

(Behavior)

- Defines the challenging behavior in measurable/ observable terms

(Consequence)

- Identifies the variables that have historically **reinforced** the challenging behavior

But what IS reinforcement?

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Reinforcement terminology

- Presenting/removing a stimulus following a behavior that makes it more likely that the behavior will occur again in the **future**
  - If a behavior **continues** to occur… it has been **reinforced**
  - If a behavior **no longer** occurs… it has been **punished***

*"punished" in this presentation refers to the technical definition of "punishment" found in Behavioral Science literature. This is not referring to any harmful, degrading, or un-approved restrictive procedures.

But what IS reinforcement?

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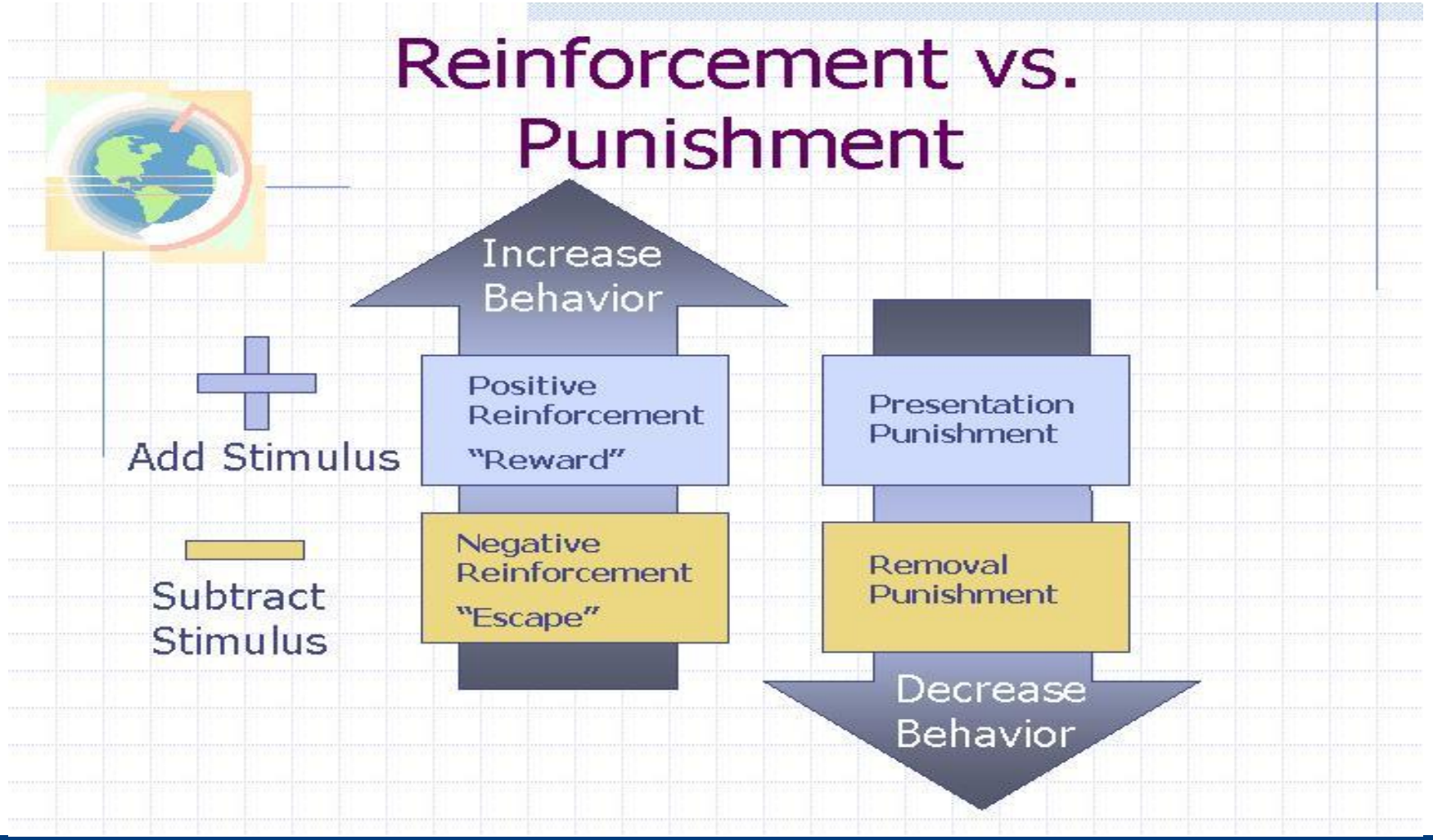

Examples

- When Jaime says "the dishes in the dishwasher are clean", Jordan puts the dishes away
  - Positive Reinforcement: Kiss on the cheek and "thanks for putting the dishes away"

    .....Jordan puts the dishes away more often in the future
  - Negative Reinforcement: Jaime stops passive-aggressively mentioning that the dishes are clean ....Jordan puts the dishes away more often in the future
- When Jordan comes home from his hockey game, he leaves his stinky hockey gear in the shared car
  - Positive Punishment: Jaime tells Jordan he needs to clean the stink out of the car… Jordan no longer leaves hockey gear in the car in the future
  - Negative Punishment: Jaime takes away Jordan's hockey gear… Jordan no longer leaves hockey gear in the car in the future

Extinction

No longer adding or subtracting a stimulus after a behavior

No longer allowing a behavior to provide reinforcement

What do we know about reinforcement?

- Reinforcer ≠ Reward
- Reinforcement does not take your intentions into account
  - We don't know if a consequence is reinforcing until future situations
- Reinforcement is not universal
  - Every individual has different reinforcers (and punishers)
- Reinforcement Strategies must be faded over time
  - Continuous reinforcement should be used when teaching a new behavior
  - "Scheduled" reinforcement should be used as the new behavior begins to take hold and until "natural" level of reinforcement is reached
    - For a quick overview of reinforcement schedules:
      - https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wmopen-psychology/chapter/reading-reinforcement-schedules/

What do we know about reinforcement?

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The Most Effective Reinforcers are:

- Personal
  - Meaningful to the individual
- Immediate
  - Given immediately after the behavior to be reinforced
- Contingent
  - Given when the behavior has occurred and not when undesired behavior occurs
- In the "Goldilocks" Zone
  - Not too much or too little, but just right

Functions of Behavior

S.E.A.T

- **Sensory** = Automatically Reinforced
- **Escape** =Negatively Reinforced
- **Attention & Tangible =** Positively Reinforced

- https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/S.E.A.T.-Functions-of-Behavior-Cheat-Sheet.pdf

S.E.A.T.

SENSORY. ESCAPE. ATTENTION. TANGIBLE.
Functions of Behavior Cheat Sheet
The whys, whens, and hows you can help!
www.paautism.org/seat

Sensory

Why? To get sensory experience - it feels good

When? Anytime, even when alone

How to Help? Find an activity that provides the same sensory experience

Example: An individual is humming loudly to hear his own voice, offer him headphones that play music

Non-example: An individual is humming loudly to hear his own voice and you give him a light up stick

What to do Proactively? Have available access to sensory items through the day

Escape

Why? To get out of unwanted activities or interactions

When? Something is hard, boring, not fun

How to Help? Break the task down into a smaller step/ Teach to ask for a break/ Provide tons of praise for working hard

Example: An individual is asked to clean up and they start to tantrum, ask them to pick up 1 item and put it away, then praise, help them with the rest

Non-example: An individual has been asked to clean up and they start to tantrum, you tell them they don't have to clean up anymore

What to do Proactively? Keep tasks small with frequent breaks and build in fun activities with boring activities

Attention

Why? To get access to people or interactions

When? Not getting enough attention or reaction

How to Help? Provide tons of praise for appropriate requests for your attention/ Teach to ask for attention appropriately

Example: If the individual is screaming while two adults are speaking to each other, let the individual know when they are quiet they can talk too and praise for a moment of quiet and provide attention.

Non-example: If the individual is screaming while two other adults are speaking to each other, stop your conversation and give your undivided attention to the individual.

What to do Proactively? Let the person know you have to speak with another person but if they need you tap your shoulder and provide tons of attention for appropriate behavior other times of the day.

Tangible

Why? To get access to items/activities

When? Something wanted is not available

How to Help? Offer an alternative, you can't have this but you can do A or B. Or First-then, first we do this then you can have that!

Example: If the individual is crying because they went to the Ice Cream store and arrived and it was closed, let the individual know that you can either go to the grocery store to get ice cream or another ice cream store.

Non-example: If the individual is crying because they went to the Ice Cream store and arrived and it was closed, so you give them tablet to play with instead.

What to do Proactively? Use First/Then Statements and let them know when an activity is going to end by setting a timer.

Preference Assessments

- Include both direct and indirect methods for discovering individual preferences
- Can give a educated idea of what may be reinforcing to an individual BUT,
- Preference does not always = Reinforcement

For a general overview of Preference Assessments:

https://asatonline.org/research-treatment/clinical-corner/conducting-preference-assessments-with-individuals-with-autism/

*See Reinforcement Inventory for Adults

Preference Assessments

- When conducting a preference assessment or identifying potential edible or tangible reinforcers when working with a participant, always be sure the objects identified are age appropriate and are permitted to be used as reinforcers in the situation in which intervention(s) will take place.

- In some settings and especially when working with adults, it may not be appropriate or allowable to use contingency based reinforcement strategies

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Role of Reinforcement in a BSP

FBA

Condition (antecedent)	Behavior	Hypothesis
• likely environmental predictors of the destructive/disruptive behavior	• observable description of destructive/disruptive behavior	• data-based description of the function of behavior (how the behavior has been historically reinforced)

BSP

Condition (antecedent	Behavior	Criteria
• In the same situational/environmental context as above	• we hope to see X (a more socially – acceptable, less destructive/disruptive behavior)	• how much support is needed, how much/how often, how long.

Antecedent Strategies

What will we do ahead of time to make the challenging behavior less likely to occur?

- Make tasks easier / shorter in duration
- Make environment less overwhelming
- Develop cues/prompts to increase replacement behavior
- Make the challenging behavior unnecessary be providing the historical reinforcer ahead of time

Replacement/ Alternate Strategies

Replacement Strategies

- Teach skills that have same function and as efficient as the challenging Bx.
- Must meet the same outcome identified as the function in the FBA,

Alternate Strategies

- Teach skills that are not-functionally equivalent but **lessen** the need for the individual to achieve that function in that situation.
  - Think "coping skills"
- May also reinforce "warning signs" when challenging behavior is dangerous

Note about Alternative Strategies

- If the alternative strategy is focused on **compliance** with a request, there must be a more appropriate replacement behavior taught that allows the participant to escape or delay the request.

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Consequence Strategies

Strategies that tell support team members how to respond to a number of behaviors that may be seen in a previously challenging environment/situation.

Must be implemented consistently by all team members to be effective.

What was the original function again?

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Consequence Strategies

Reinforce Replacement Behavior

- When replacement skill happens… **same reinforcer** that previously reinforced the challenging behavior

Reinforce Alternate Behavior

- When alternate behavior happens
  - Same reinforcer that previously reinforced the challenging behavior
  - Pair the natural reinforcement provided from the alternative skill

Extinction

- No longer provide reinforcement for the destructive/disruptive behavior

EXAMPLE

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FBA

Condition (antecedent)	Behavior	Hypothesis
• When asked to clean his room	• Rio slams the door and curses	• In order to delay cleaning his room

BSP

Condition (antecedent)	Behavior	Criteria
• When asked to clean his room	• Rio will clean his room, or ask for a break to delay cleaning his room	• With less than 2 prompts, 9/10 opportunities for 13 consecutive weeks

Antecedent Strategies

During the initial plan development…

- Work with Rio and his family on making a compromise about what a clean room looks like
- Help Rio clean to a standard that everyone can agree to for now and take a picture to show what a clean room looks like.
- Create a schedule with Rio ahead of time to indicate when he will clean.
- Clean in chunks that Rio can stay engaged with. He says he gets frustrated with cleaning after 15 minutes.
- Ask Rio to see what areas he has most difficulty with. Observe Rio to see if more formal supports might be needed with certain tasks
- Ask Rio how he would like to be reminded to clean his room when he misses scheduled cleaning times or when it does not look like the reference picture after cleaning.

Antecedent Strategies

- Review Rio's cleaning schedule with him on Monday's. It is kept on the bulletin board above his desk along with his "clean room reference picture"
- Rio has indicated he gets frustrated with cleaning after 15 minutes. Make sure to offer a break to Rio after he has been cleaning for 10 minutes.
- Ask Rio if there is any steps, he needs help with before cleaning.
- Acknowledge that cleaning is boring for Rio and you know it's hard for him
- Ask Rio to review the clean room reference picture before cleaning
- If Rio has missed scheduled cleaning remind him while you are reviewing the daily schedule at the beginning of your shift. Let Rio pick when to add cleaning to the schedule for the day.

Replacement / Alternate Strategies

Replacement Strategies

- Rio will ask for a break
- Rio will say "not right now" and indicate when he will clean his room next

Alternate Strategies

- Rio will use "square breathing" before responding
- **Rio will begin to clean his room (goal)**

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Consequence Strategies

Reinforce Replacement Behavior

When Rio asks for a break (delays cleaning)

- Say sure thing and tell Rio you will set a timer for 10 minutes
- When the timer goes off ask Rio if he is ready to go back to cleaning

When Rio says he will clean later (delays cleaning)

- Say sure and ask him when he wants to clean and if he needs a reminder,
- Ask him to update his cleaning calendar
- Tell him you will remind him at the time he specified

Reinforce Alternative Behavior

When Rio cleans his room:

- Offer praise and remind Rio that now you have time to work on more fun stuff. Ask Rio what he wants to do with the extra time.
- Make sure the team does not mention cleaning again until his next scheduled cleaning passes

When Rio uses deep breaths after being asked to clean

- Ask him if he needs a break and if so offer one
- Ask him if he needs assistance and if so offer a reasonable amount of help ,but do not clean for him

Extinction

When Rio curses or slams the door after being asked to clean

- Tell Rio that if he asks for a break you will give him one
- Prompt Rio to ask for a break
- Immediately give him a break and follow strategies to reinforce the asking for a break behavior.

Considerations of reinforcers when working with adults

- Is the reinforcer age appropriate and socially appropriate?
  - If no, find a more age and socially appropriate reinforcer
- Does the individual own the item?
  - If yes, this cannot be used as a reinforcer
- Is access to this item or activity included as part of the service being provided to the individual
  - This should not be used as a reinforcer. This should be provided as part of the service.

Considerations of reinforcers when working with adults

- If the function is general attention seeking, should access to meaningful attention from paid support be used as a reinforcer?
  - No, meaningful attention is a core component of direct service
- Have the reinforcement strategies changed over time?
  - We all get bored (satiated) of reinforcers, so strategies need to be updated

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Restrictive Interventions

Restrictive Procedures

- When identifying reinforcement procedures, we must always prioritize an individuals rights and autonomy.
- There may be specific situations where an individual's health and safety require restrictive procedures be used, however the LEAST restrictive strategies should always be used and non-restrictive strategies must be tried first.

Restrictive Procedures

- A Restrictive Procedure is a practice that does one or more of the following:
  - Limits an individual's movement, activity or function
  - Interferes with an individual's ability to acquire positive reinforcement
  - Results in the loss of objects or activities that an individual values
  - Requires an individual to engage in behavior that the individual would not engage in given freedom of choice
- All Restrictive Procedures must be approved by a Human Rights Team prior to implementation and only when the procedure is necessary to ensure health and safety of the individual.

6100.341 Definition of a Restrictive Procedure

Restrictive Procedures

- **A practice that limits a participant's movement, activity or function**
  - Restraint
  - Physical Assists
  - Helmets or Mitts for behavioral reasons (e.g., self-injurious behavior)
  - Not permitting someone access to the internet or WiFi devices
  - Blocking access to a room, activity or person (e.g., installing a half door to prevent person from entry in to kitchen because of food related behaviors)

Restrictive Procedures

- **A practice that interferes with a participant's ability to acquire positive reinforcement**
  - Removing a participant from the immediate environment that is reinforcing (e.g., Exclusionary Time Out)
  - Contingent Observation (e.g., asking someone to stand or sit away from the group)
  - Using a highly structured reinforcement strategies such as differential reinforcement
  - Ignoring (ignoring the participant, but ignoring the behavior but not the person is not restrictive)
  - "If you don't eat your meat, you can't have any pudding"

Restrictive Procedures

- **A practice that results in the loss of objects or activities that the participant values**
  - Token economies that result in loss of objects or activities (response cost)
  - Using contingencies (e.g., you didn't take a shower today so you can't go your coin collectors group tonight)

Restrictive Procedures

- **A practice that requires individual to engage in behavior he or she would not engage in if given freedom of choice**
  - Requiring the person to clean up the damages made by knocking items off the table but also cleaning the entire kitchen (e.g., overcorrection)
  - Requiring a person to exercise
  - Requiring a person to attend/participate in AA meetings
  - Requiring someone to shower every morning

Challenge

- **Think of the BSPs / SBP's you are involved in implementing**
  - Are the consequence strategies personal?
  - Are there strategies other than verbal praise?
  - Do the consequence strategies tell you what to do when you observe:
    - Replacement Behaviors?
    - Alternative Behaviors?
    - Challenging Behaviors?
  - Are there are strategies that are restrictive?
  - Has everyone on the team been trained on the plan?
  - Is everyone on the team following the plan consistently?

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Related Trainings on myodp.org

- Addressing Motivation Issues:
  - https://www.myodp.org/course/view.php?id=1261
  - https://www.myodp.org/course/view.php?id=1262
- Staff Influence on Challenging Behaviors
  - https://www.myodp.org/course/view.php?id=697
- Application of Applied Behavior Analysis
  - https://www.myodp.org/course/view.php?id=1279
- Working as One Team:
  - https://www.myodp.org/course/view.php?id=1295

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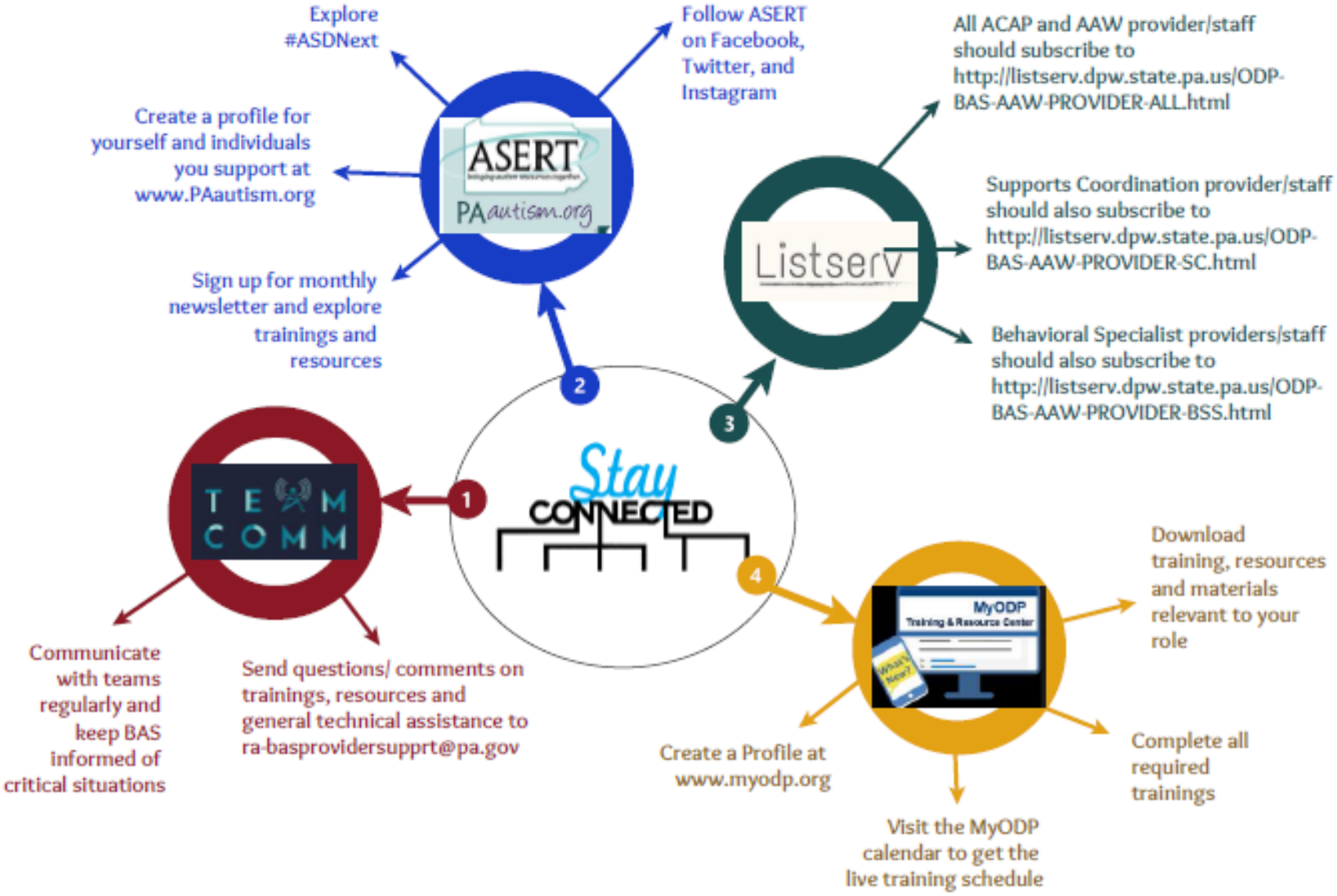
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