

# The Pairing Process

"Pairing" is the building of a positive relationship with the student and is the process of developing a fun, working relationship with any child. During the pairing process, the teacher or assistant will connect with the child by learning their favorite items and activities. Developing this type of relationship will establish us as a form of reinforcement and can increase the likelihood that the student will do the things that are asked of them during their 1-1 Direct Instruction sessions. The pairing process is basically playing with a purpose!

## Definition

Pairing is the process where you establish yourself as a reinforcer to build a positive relationship with your student. (a reinforcer is something a child likes)

When pairing, you associate a neutral stimulus (in this case, you and your words because you are unfamiliar to them) with something that is already reinforcing to the child. The result of pairing is that the neutral stimulus (again, in this case, it is you) becomes reinforcing to the child via being paired with something that they already find reinforcing (like a favorite toy).

## Important tips to remember...

It is important to have some knowledge of the child's reinforcers. This helps when choosing items that you know the child likes. This is why we ask families to fill out a reinforcer profile. It is also important to choose items that are easy for you to control and that will go away by themselves, so you don't have to take them away (giving M & Ms rather than a stuffed toy you can give only once and have to take away to re-present it as a reinforcer).

I like to take a positive approach with every student and try to emphasize giving reinforcement for all of the "expected" behaviors that occur (such as waiting for something, sitting, listening or making eye contact, and responding to their name or reacting to a command or direction.)

Keep in mind that pairing does not just happen once and may take a long time. It also needs to be continued to be fostered with each teacher or assistant that interacts with the child/student. We don't ever want to take this process for granted as it is critical to having a student want to work with or for you on their lesson plan.

### **How it looks in action**

Present yourself and your words with the delivery of reinforcement. Reinforce the interaction with the child without placing demands. (When pairing, reinforcement is NOT contingent on the child doing or saying something, so they are able to have the reinforcement regardless of their response)

For pairing with the reinforcers, I will present these as often as I can with as many interactions. Especially in the beginning, I will proceed to engage with the child in free play with little demands. These interactions are very playful, and I will try to incorporate the reinforcing items in the play. My words (playful, not directives or commanding) should come before giving the reinforcer so that the student learns the situation will get better by just being with you when the reinforcing items are not present. So, initially, reinforcement of the favorite item is free, and then as the pairing grows, it may become contingent on some form of interaction with you, such as a simple approach, or sitting near you or at circle time/whole group. Then we reach a point where the reinforcing item can be faded - and we will be at the point where I have paired with the child. Pairing can be thought of as how to become a reinforcing item for them.

### **It is very important!**

The goal of pairing is to teach the child to respond favorably to being in your presence and to want to come when they see you or stay with you (rather than leaving the space to not work with the teacher).

Without pairing, the foundation of learning, along with the connection between the child and teacher, is not there. This connection is an essential piece to the child's growth and success in learning.