

desired behavior. Delaying reinforcement tends not to work well, especially when dealing with animals and small children. (For older children and adults who can think about future reinforcements, such as saving up one's money to buy a highly desired item, some delayed reinforcement can work—for them, just saving the money is reinforcing as they think about their future purchase.) The second factor in effective reinforcement is to reinforce *only* the desired behavior. This should be obvious, but we all slip up at times; for example, many parents make the mistake of giving a child who has not done some chore the promised treat anyway, which completely undermines the child's learning of that chore or task. And who hasn't given a treat to a pet that has not really done the trick?

So I think I get reinforcement now, but what about punishment? How does punishment fit into the big picture?

THE ROLE OF PUNISHMENT IN OPERANT CONDITIONING

5.7 What is punishment and how does it differ from reinforcement?

Let's go back to the discussion of positive and negative reinforcement. These strategies are important for *increasing* the likelihood that the targeted behavior will occur again. But what about behavior that we do not want to reoccur?

DEFINING PUNISHMENT Punishment is actually the opposite of reinforcement. It is any event or stimulus that, when following a response, causes that response to be less likely to happen again. Punishment *weakens* responses, whereas reinforcement (no matter whether it is positive or negative) *strengthens* responses. Let's look at these two concepts in more detail.

People experience two kinds of things as consequences in the world: things they like (food, money, candy, sex, praise, and so on) and things they don't like (spankings, being yelled at, and experiencing any kind of pain, to name a few). In addition, people experience these two kinds of consequences in one of two ways: Either people experience them directly (such as getting money for working or getting yelled at for misbehaving) or they don't experience them, such as losing an allowance for misbehaving or avoiding a scolding by lying about misbehavior. These four consequences are named and described in **Table 5.2**.

First, take a look at the left column of Table 5.2, the one labeled "Reinforcement." Getting money for working is an example of *positive reinforcement*, the reinforcement of a response by the *addition* or experience of a *pleasurable* consequence, as mentioned earlier. That one everyone understands. But what about avoiding a penalty by turning one's income tax return in on time? That is an example of *negative reinforcement*, the reinforcement of a response by the *removal or escape* from an *unpleasant* consequence. Because the behavior (submitting the return before the deadline) results in *avoiding* an unpleasant stimulus (a penalty), the likelihood that the person will behave that way again (turn it in on time in the future) is *increased*—just as positive reinforcement will increase a behavior's likelihood. Examples are the best way to figure out the difference between these two types of reinforcement, so try to figure out which of the following examples would be positive reinforcement and which would be negative reinforcement:

1. Arnie's father nags him to wash his car. Arnie hates being nagged, so he washes the car so his father will stop nagging.
2. Trey learns that talking in a funny voice gets him lots of attention from his classmates, so now he talks that way often.
3. Allen is a server at a restaurant and always tries to smile and be pleasant because that seems to lead to bigger tips.
4. An Li turns her report in to her teacher on the day it is due because papers get marked down a letter grade for every day they are late.