



# BEING A TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITY

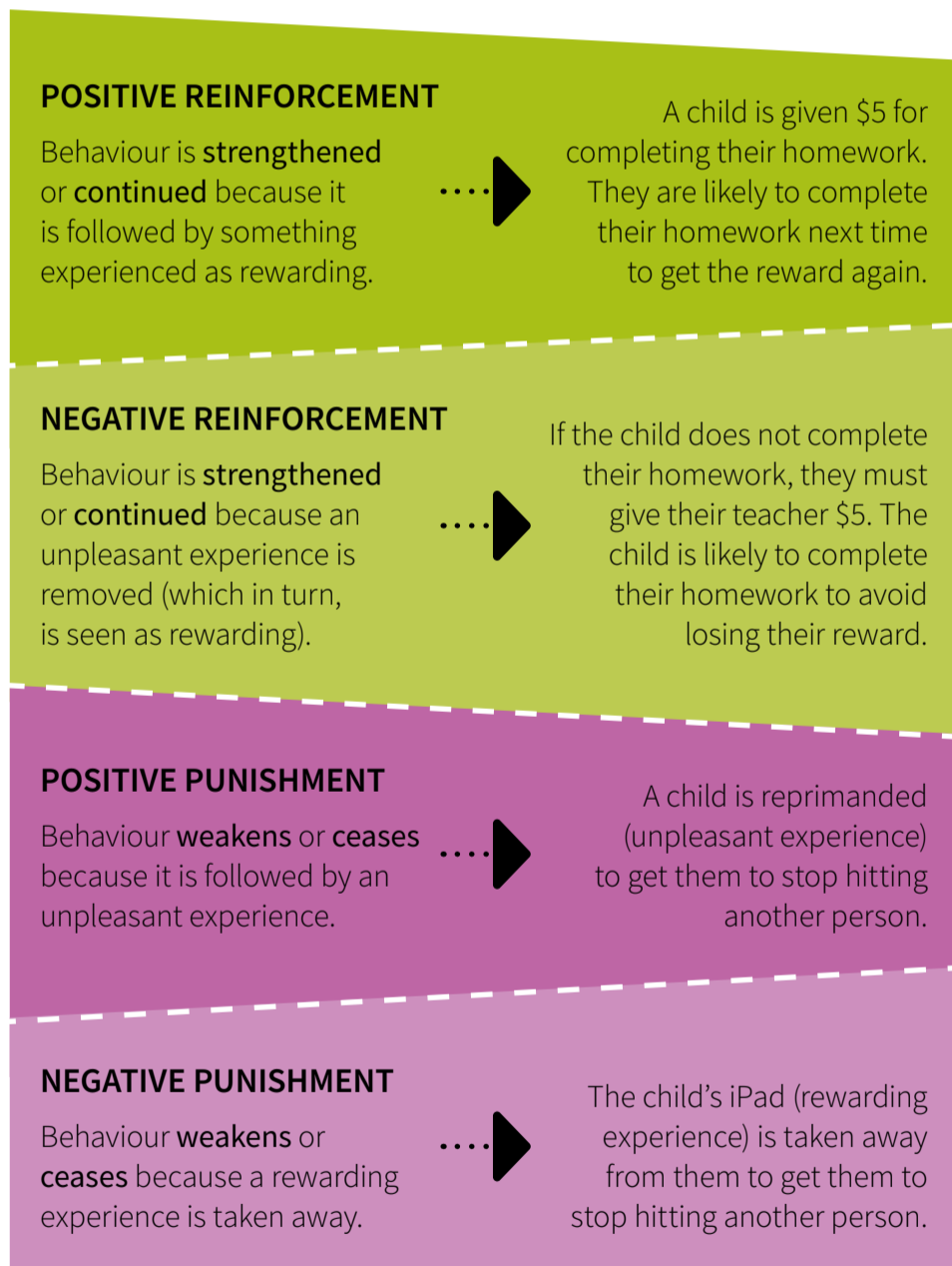
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## POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT WHY TRADITIONAL METHODS OF BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT OFTEN DON'T WORK

As we grow up, we look to those caring for us to teach us right from wrong. We learn what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. Typically, we learn this through rewards and consequences. As adults caring for children, we tend to use this same approach to manage a child's behaviour. But, does this traditional approach work for children who have experienced trauma? Often the answer is no.

### Rewards and consequences

Traditional behaviour management is based on 'operant conditioning' – a learning theory that suggests behaviour followed by positive experiences (rewards) tend to be repeated, while behaviour followed by negative experiences (consequences) are less likely to be repeated. The principles of this theory are:



### Children who have experienced trauma

So why is the approach less effective with children who have experienced trauma?

- Traditional methods don't take into account a child's **experience** of trauma and adversity, brain development, mood, cognition or motivation in determining if rewards and consequences will work.
- Children can be **hyper-sensitive to threat** (perceived and actual) and perceive consequences and punishment as threats and attempts by adults to control them, which they often defy.
- Punishment only teaches what not to do. The unwanted behaviour is usually **suppressed**, associated with fear and aggression, and returns when the punishment is removed.
- Traditional methods require **secure attachments**. Children who don't feel secure with their carer can view consequences and punishments as threats to their relationship or safety triggering a fight/flight/freeze response – the brain focuses on detecting danger rather than rational thinking. The child is in no state to reason or consider possible consequences.

This is why it is so important to make 'meaning' of a child's behaviour and not use 'auto-pilot' traditional methods to manage challenging behaviour.



Check out Part 2 in our positive behaviour support series. It gives you a trauma-informed lens to understand and respond to behaviour.

Note: The terms 'child' and 'children' also refer to 'young person' and 'young people'.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Sources:

> Training Institute – Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy Institute, 2018. *Dyadic Developmental Practice, Psychotherapy and Parenting. Introducing a Framework for Therapy and Parenting Developmentally Traumatized Children.*



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Published 2019