

Stimulus Satiation

Stimulus satiation is a behaviour reduction technique that involves deliberately presenting a stimulus (usually one that a student seeks excessively) in such high frequency or intensity that its reinforcing value diminishes. The individual becomes "satiated" or overexposed to the stimulus, leading to a decrease in the behaviour motivated by obtaining it. This is a **non-punitive, antecedent strategy** used within positive behaviour support (PBS) frameworks, particularly when a behaviour serves a sensory or tangible function.

It is especially helpful for students with disabilities who may engage in repetitive behaviours, self-stimulatory actions, or strong preferences for specific items or routines.

How Stimulus Satiation Fits into a Positive Behaviour Support Multielement Plan

A **multielement plan** in PBS typically includes:

- Proactive (antecedent) strategies
- Teaching replacement behaviours
- Reactive strategies (response to behaviour)
- Ecological and setting adjustments
- Long-term skill development
- Stimulus satiation fits into the proactive strategies component by modifying the environment to reduce the motivation for the problem behaviour.

Examples of Stimulus Satiation in Practice

Tactile or Sensory Stimulation

Context: A student frequently seeks tactile input by tapping on hard surfaces or touching staff's clothing.

Stimulus Satiation Strategy: Provide the student with access to a wide variety of tactile materials (e.g., squishy balls, textured fabric, sensory bins) for an extended period, even beyond the point where the student normally disengages.

Goal: Reduce the reinforcing value of the tapping behaviour by oversupplying similar sensory input.

Repetitive Access to Tangible Items

Context: A student consistently engages in disruptive behaviour to access a specific toy, like a spinning top.

Stimulus Satiation Strategy: Allow the student to engage with the spinning top uninterrupted for a prolonged session several times a day.

Goal: Over time, the toy becomes less desirable, reducing motivation for problem behaviours associated with obtaining it.

Auditory Preferences

Context: A student repeatedly vocalises or hums to self-stimulate with sound.

Stimulus Satiation Strategy: Use headphones or a speaker to play music or repetitive sounds the student enjoys, offering frequent, extended exposure throughout the day.

Goal: Reduce the novelty and need for vocalisation as self-stimulatory behaviour.

Routine-Based Satiation

Context: A student with autism demands strict adherence to a preferred classroom job (e.g. feeding the class fish) and becomes distressed if it is not their turn.

Stimulus Satiation Strategy: Assign the job to the student every day for two weeks straight, allowing them to do it until the task loses novelty.

Goal: Lessen attachment to the routine by overexposure, allowing for better flexibility over time.

Cautions and Considerations

Data-Driven: Stimulus satiation should be implemented based on functional behaviour assessment (FBA) data confirming the behaviour's function.

Monitoring: Continuous observation is essential to avoid inadvertently reinforcing the behaviour.

Ethical Practice: Avoid overuse; ensure the strategy is not aversive or overly controlling. Always respect the student's rights and preferences.

Pair with Skill Development: Teach alternative behaviours (e.g. communication, requesting breaks) to ensure long-term success.

Summary

Stimulus satiation is a useful, evidence-based tool within a multielement PBS plan that reduces the desirability of certain stimuli to decrease related problem behaviours. When carefully implemented, especially in classrooms supporting students with disabilities, it can foster a more engaged, regulated, and inclusive learning environment.