

Box 2-4**Suggestions for Material Reinforcement**

- Address book
- Art supplies
- Badges
- Ball
- Balloons
- Bean bags
- Book
- Bookmark
- Bubble blowing set
- Calendar
- Audio cassette tapes
- Chalk
- Clay or play dough
- Colored paper
- Coloring books
- Comics
- Cosmetics
- Crayons
- Eraser
- Games
- Good Student certificates
- Grab-Bag: toys, candy, decals
- Hackey Sack
- Jacks
- Jewelry
- Jump rope
- Key chains
- Magic markers
- Marbles
- Miniature cars
- Model kits
- New pencil
- Paintbrushes/paints
- Play money
- Positive note home
- Positive phone call home
- Posters
- Puzzles
- Real money
- Rings
- School supplies
- Seasonal cards
- Self-stick skin tattoos
- Stickers
- Stuffed animals
- Surprise treats or rewards (random)
- Toiletries
- Toys
- Wax lips and teeth
- Yo-yo

Assessing and Selecting Reinforcement

It is a mistake for teachers to assume that they automatically know what will serve as reinforcement for Tough Kids. The rule of thumb for teachers is to try the potential reinforcer; if the behavior increases, then it is reinforcement. Many teachers assume that if they like something, or similar students like something, then a particular Tough Kid will also find that something reinforcing.

It is not unusual to hear a teacher say, "I tried positive reinforcement, but it didn't work!" Re-

member, if the behavior did not actually increase, there was no positive reinforcement. There are several practical steps in assessing potential reinforcement for Tough Kids.

First, it is important to **watch and try**. By watching Tough Kids, it is possible to determine what they like to do. The activities that students engage in are generally reinforcing. Students can be observed during free time, transition times, leisure time, and even class time. The activity the student voluntarily engages in or the item frequently asked for are likely to be reinforcing.

Examples:

In one junior high class of Tough Kids, several of the students would always rush to use the snack machines in the lunchroom. When the teacher observed how popular this activity was, she made the use of the machines (with the students' own money)



Pointer Box 2-1

Where to Find Novel Reinforcers

Interesting and unique reinforcers may be found in a variety of places. Some of the more popular places with examples of what they offer are listed below:

Costume Shops

- costume accessories
- make-up
- masks
- wigs

Flea Markets and Teachers' Attics/Basements

- old clothes for "dress up"
- sports equipment
- toys, books, comic books, games

Magic or Trick Shop

- "mind bender" puzzles and games
- simple magic tricks

Novelty Stores

- artificial scars
- broken glass decals
- disappearing ink
- fake melted ice cream bar
- flavored toothpicks
- hand buzzer
- plastic ants
- plastic ice cube with fly in it
- rubber vomit

contingent upon the earning of a prespecified number of points for appropriate behavior that day.

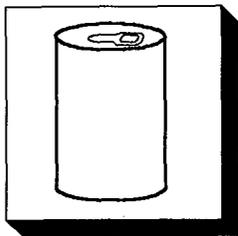
Mrs. King noticed that Sherry, Ben, and Michael spent their free time coloring with magic markers on detailed posters which she had made available. Once she saw how popular the activity was, she began to make the use of the markers contingent upon appropriate behavior. For each instructional session in which students earned eight out of ten possible behavior points, they could color with markers on their posters for three minutes.

Asking is also an important step in assessing reinforcers. While in some cases students may have a hard time thinking of things they would like to earn, many students will be able to give the teacher ideas. It is certainly worth the teacher's time to simply ask the student what he/she would like to earn. Above all, the Tough Kid's teacher must learn to **think** like a Tough Kid in order to select effective reinforcement.

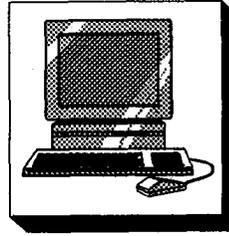
Reinforcer checklists are another means of determining effective reinforcement for individual students. The checklists contain lists of potential reinforcers which are generally listed according to categories such as edible, material, social, etc. A reinforcer checklist may be teacher-made or purchased commercially (Cautela & Brion-Meisels, 1979; Gelfand & Hartmann, 1975; Clement & Richard, 1976). Students are simply asked to check the items which they would like to earn. For students who cannot read, the teacher can interview the student and read the lists to him/her, marking the selections.

A variation of a reinforcer checklist is a **reinforcer menu** (see Figure 2-1). This approach may be particularly useful with students who have difficulty communicating their needs and wants. A menu is simply a list of pictures (cut from magazines or drawn) of known reinforcers that the student likes. In selecting a reinforcer, the student has only to point to the item of choice. The items can be changed or updated peri-

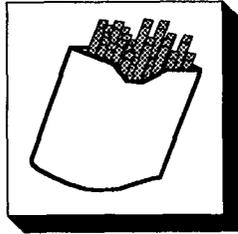
Figure 2-1
Reinforcer Menu



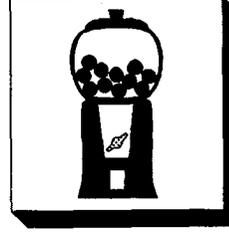
Soda Pop



10 Min.
Computer Time



French Fries



Gum



Pencil



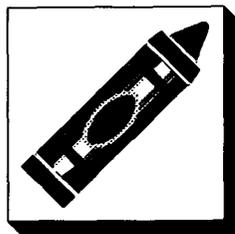
Doughnuts



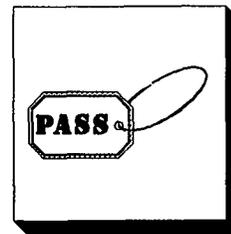
Popcorn



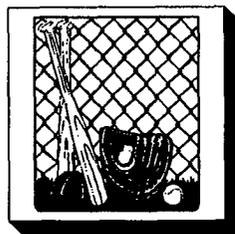
Time to
Yourself



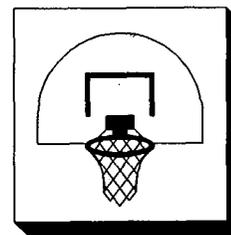
Color



Free Time Pass



Recess
Equipment



Shoot Baskets

odically. Mystery (denoted as ???) or surprise items may also be included on the menu.

Reinforcement sampling is another assessment technique to determine effective reinforcers. With reinforcement sampling, a number of potential reinforcers are displayed for a limited period of time (e.g. an hour, a day, etc.) so that students can see them and access them. The teacher simply observes what types of reinforcers students sample (food, toys, activities) during this time and writes them down. Selected reinforcers can then be made into a reinforcement menu.

One mistake that teachers of Tough Kids sometimes make is to go ahead and give students the reinforcer first, after extracting a promise that they will do what it is they are supposed to do. For example, Shane's teacher may tell him he may go on the class field trip if he promises not to get in any fights the rest of the week.

Grandma's Law, also known as the **Premack Principle**, is a rule about reinforcement that grandmothers seem to have known about and

used since the beginning of time (Premack, 1959). According to this principle, the reinforcer is always given **after** the desired behavior and never before. For example:

Grandma told Jeannie, "Eat your liver and onions first and then you may have cookies and ice cream."

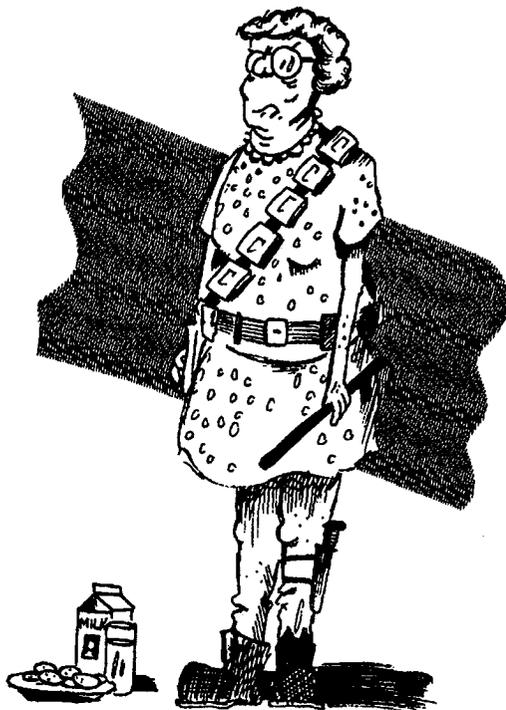
Kenny's teacher, Ms. Young, said, "After you finish your work, you may go out to recess."

Grandma's Law is common sense. Do this . . . and then I will give you what you want. Teachers frequently turn the principle around, however, rendering what they considered to be reinforcement ineffective. For example:

Grandma told Jeannie, "OK, go ahead and eat your cookies and ice cream first. But I want you to promise me that you will then eat your liver and onions."

Kenny's teacher, Ms. Young, said, "I'm going to go ahead and let you go out to recess if you will be sure to finish your work as soon as you come back in."

These examples typify common mistakes. In these situations, the desired behaviors (e.g., chores, school work, etc.) usually do not occur.



"Grandma's Law"

"But Doctor, Nothing Reinforces My Student!"

While it is more difficult to find effective reinforcers for some students than others, there is **always** something that will reinforce a student. The only time this will not be true is if the student is dead! There is always some edible, natural, material or social reinforcer that will work—the trick is to find it (see Box 2-5). Once reinforcers have been selected, the teacher may have to improve the effectiveness of the reinforcers to make them work.

Box 2-5**The Golden Rule for Selecting Reinforcers**

There is a **Golden Rule** for selecting reinforcers. If it is not followed, the reinforcers generally do not work. The Golden Rule states that any selected reinforcers should not cost a lot of **money**, should not take a lot of staff **time**, and should be **natural**, whenever possible.

Anyone can think of expensive, highly artificial or time consuming reinforcers. The problem is

that the reinforcers will not be used consistently or frequently under these circumstances. There are thousands of reinforcers which are not too costly in terms of time and money and many which are also natural. Selecting reinforcers is a great time for the Tough Kids' teacher to exercise creativity!