Try ‘Conditioning’ to Help Students Break Bad Habits

Even when kids want to break a bad habit, they often can’t. Experts say the only sure way to break a habit is to use the same process that formed the habit in the first place. Most habits are formed through a process known as “conditioning.”

Kids, like adults, become “conditioned” to doing something because, every time they do it, they receive reinforcement. They get some pleasure out of it. Or they avoid some displeasure.

To break a negative habit, help your teen:

- **Discover the reasons** for the habit ... and address them.
- **Identify what is reinforcing the habit** ... and stop it.
- **Reinforce a new habit.** For example, let your teen talk on the phone or watch TV after he has spent a suitable amount of time studying.
- **Give himself mental “leverage.”** Research and discuss all the reasons why your teen should stop a habit. Make lists—How does it hurt him personally? How will doing something differently make him happier?
- **Keep a progress chart.** Noting even small
improvements reinforces continued change.