

Table 5.3

Negative Reinforcement Versus Punishment by Removal

EXAMPLE OF NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT

Stopping at a red light to avoid getting in an accident.

Mailing an income tax return by April 15 to avoid paying a penalty.

Obedying a parent before the parent reaches the count of "three" to avoid getting a scolding.

EXAMPLE OF PUNISHMENT BY REMOVAL

Losing the privilege of driving because you got into too many accidents.

Having to lose some of your money to pay the penalty for late tax filing.

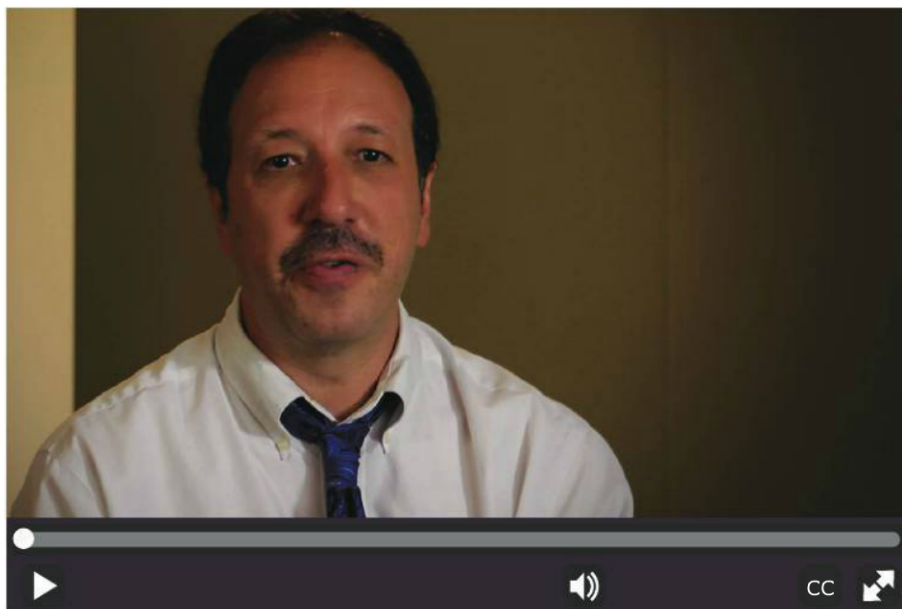
Being "grounded" (losing your freedom) because of disobedience.

unpleasant has just gone away as a consequence of that response, wouldn't that response tend to happen again and again? If the response increases, the consequence has to be a kind of *re-inforcement*. The problem is that the name sounds like it should be some kind of punishment because of the word *negative*, and that's exactly the problem that many people experience when they are trying to understand negative reinforcement. Many people get negative reinforcement mixed up with punishment by removal, in which a *pleasant* thing is removed (like having your driver's license taken away because you caused a bad accident). Because something is removed (taken away) in both cases, it's easy to think that they will both have the effect of punishment, or weakening a response. The difference between them lies in *what* is taken away: In the case of negative reinforcement, it is an *unpleasant* thing; in the case of punishment by removal, it is a *pleasant* or desirable thing. For a head-to-head comparison of negative reinforcement and this particular type of punishment by removal, see **Table 5.3**.

PROBLEMS WITH PUNISHMENT

5.8 What are some of the problems with using punishment?

Although punishment can be effective in reducing or weakening a behavior, it has several drawbacks as explained in the video *Thinking Like a Psychologist: Physical Punishment—You Decide! : Problems with Punishment*.



Watch the Video. *Thinking Like a Psychologist: Physical Punishment—You Decide! : Problems with Punishment.*

The job of punishment is much harder than that of reinforcement. In using reinforcement, all one has to do is strengthen a response that is already there. But punishment is used