

800 psychologists hear talk on behavior in retarded

More than 800 psychologists and therapy aides from the Willowbrook Developmental Center and other Department of Mental Hygiene facilities in the New York metropolitan area attended day-long sessions at the Island institution yesterday on behavior modification techniques given by one of the country's leading authorities on the subject.

Dr. Nathan H. Azrin, the director of the Behavior Research Laboratory at the Anna (Ill.) State Hospital and one of the pioneers in behavior modification, was there to explain his training procedures which have been gaining wide acceptance from both the clinical community and the parents of normal children as well.

Dr. Azrin's techniques are designed to deal with such basic behavioral problems as aggression, toilet-training, mealtime habits, floor sprawling and others through intensive sessions with the thera-

pist.

He explained that most children are trained simply through imitation — the child will watch his parent do it right until he himself wants to do it. However, in classroom situations, children will often wind up imitating the bad habits of their companions.

Dr. Azrin's technique basically revolves around motivation and reward. Intensive one-to-one sessions with a therapist are the vehicles for the training. Spanking and anger are explicitly excluded. Rather, the child is made the center of loving attention. During the training session the child must be hugged, praised and rewarded for good performance.

Dr. Azrin said that retarded children can often be further motivated by using games, body movement, clapping and other forms of communication that energize the child constructively.

Dr. Azrin's techniques are already being used at many state institutions, and he has shown that problems such as toilet training and self-aggression can be eliminated in just a few sessions.

"We have found that lack of intelligence is no longer an obstacle to normal functioning, except in cases where there is a physical handicap," Dr. Azrin said.

He said that his methods work just as well for normal children. The only difference is that retarded children may require more communication through body expression while

normal children can understand words of encouragement.

After co-authoring a book with a fellow associate on toilet training for the mentally retarded, he has since written another based on the same technique for normal children. The response from parents of both retarded and normal children has been significant.

The lecture yesterday was the first of seven to be conducted at state institutions throughout the state. The lectures are being funded by a unit of the Civil Service Employees Association for the introduction of new programs on training ward personnel.