



Teaching Tips and Strategies: Conducting Preference Assessments to Determine the Best Motivators for your Student



Most people can easily communicate the things they like and dislike, as well as what motivates them to accomplish daily responsibilities. Since students with autism may have difficulty identifying and communicating their preferences directly, we must use alternative methods to obtain this information. It is important to keep in mind that what may be rewarding or reinforcing for one student may not be for another. A tool called a preference assessment can guide you in identifying and using the items, activities and events that a particular student enjoys. The process includes interviews, direct observation and trials with potential reinforcers, as well as data analysis.

Here are some tips and techniques that help me identify preferences and powerful reinforcers with my students with autism:

When to Conduct a Preference Assessment

There are no specific rules as to when a reinforcement assessment should be conducted. However, here are some timeframes to consider, being mindful that an individual's preferences change over time:

- The beginning of the school year
- When a student enters a new classroom
- When a student demonstrates undesirable behaviors
- When a student is not learning or maintaining a targeted skill

