

PREFERENCE **ASSESSMENTS**

for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

TIP: Use multiple types of assessments to gather the most complete and accurate information about a child's preferences.

It is important to know which items and activities a child enjoys in order to choose the best rewards to reinforce desirable behavior. Below are a few different ways to assess the preferences of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Choose the approach that will work best for a particular child or setting.

Student Interview

Interview a child and ask questions about their likes and dislikes. Give the child a list of choices and ask which they would most like to earn. Ask questions such as:

- What are your favorite activities at school?
- What are your favorite things to do after school and on the weekends?
- What are your favorite subjects in school?
- What do you like to do with your friends?

A teacher, caregiver, or service provider may conduct this assessment.

Informational Interview (informal)

Interview a few individuals who know the child well. Ask open-ended questions such as:

- If left alone, what would the child do?
- What does the child like to do with others?
- What activities help the child feel calm?
- What activities help the child stay focused?
- Where does the child like to go?

A teacher, caregiver, or service provider may conduct this assessment.

Informational Interview (structured)

Interview a few individuals who know the child well using a survey tool. The Reinforcement Assessment for Individuals with Severe Disabilities (RAISD) is one example of a survey that can be used for a structured informational interview. The survey asks about a variety of potential preferences and the conditions under which a child makes his or her choices. At the end of the survey, the interviewer ranks the potential reinforcers and can recommend the specific circumstances under which they should be used. The RAISD tool can be accessed at: www.kennedykrieger.org/sites/default/files/patient-care-files/raisd.pdf.

A teacher or psychologist may provide this assessment.

Direct Observation

Give the child free access to a wide range of items or activities and document how long the child spends with each. You can identify the items or activities with which the child spends the most time as preferences. Do not make any demands or place any restrictions on the child during the observation. Be sure to provide enough time for the child to explore different objects and activities.

A teacher, caregiver, or service provider may conduct this assessment.

Systematic Assessment

Present objects and activities to a child in a methodical way to help identify and rank a child's preferences. For example, you may present objects and activities, one at a time, in a random order, or you may simultaneously present two items or activities and ask a child to make a choice.

Systematic assessments should be conducted by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, psychologist, or other professional with training.

More information about systematic assessments can be found at:

- www.kennedykrieger.org/sites/default/files/patient-care-files/single_stimulus_preference_assessment.pdf
- www.kennedykrieger.org/sites/default/files/patient-care-files/paired_stimulus_preference_assessment.pdf

It may take some time and energy to identify a child's preferences, but the results of using effective non-food rewards will be worthwhile. Be sure to reassess a child's preferences periodically, as they are likely to change over time.