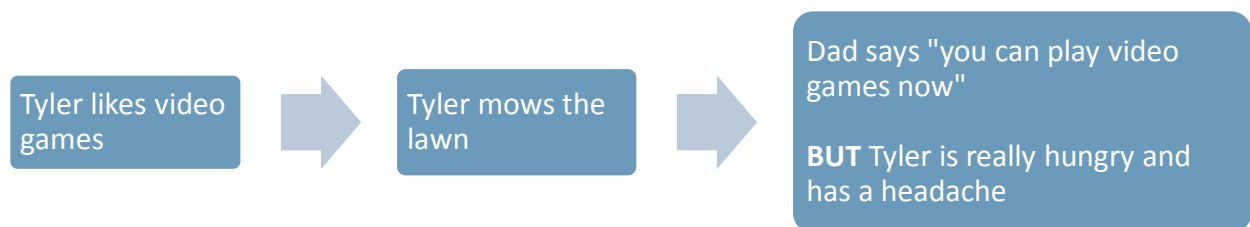# Preference Assessments

Preference assessments: identifying possible items or activities that may motivate your child/youth

Sometimes it is hard to know what items a child/youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders likes, especially if he/she has limited verbal skills. Preferences can change quickly, so you should consistently monitor child/youth's desires. This will help you understand what will motivate him/her to learn **in that moment.**

Giving a child/youth something "good" after he/she does a behaviour you want to see, **does not automatically** mean he/she will do the behaviour again. A preference assessment can help you determine if the "something good" you use is "good enough" to increase the behaviour. You might say, "Well, I tickled him last time he brushed his teeth by himself! Why didn't he brush them by himself this time? Reinforcement doesn't work for him." He might like tickles, but it might not have been a "good enough" reinforcer at that time.

Let's look at the following example:

| Tyler likes video games | → | Tyler mows the lawn | → | Dad says "you can play video games now" **BUT** Tyler is really hungry and has a headache |

Tyler has a headache, so looking at the screen to play video games might hurt. He is also hungry, so he might prefer to have a snack. Just because he likes video games, does not mean it will reinforce his behaviour of mowing the lawn in this situation.

Key Points

An assessment should be done **before** you ask the child/youth to do the behaviour, so that:

- the item can be given immediately after the behaviour

- you are confident the item is preferred and will actually reinforce the behaviour

We help kids be kids!

Direct Observation

- Set up environment as normal, or with new/extra items and activities

- Allow child/youth free time with items/activities

- Record the amount of time spent engaging with each item/activity

- Calculate total time spent with each item/activity

More time spent = Higher preference
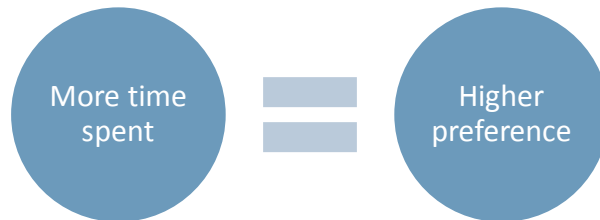
Single Item Preference Assessment

- Show the child/youth one item at a time

- Record whether child/youth engages with the item

Yes = Use!

No = Don't use
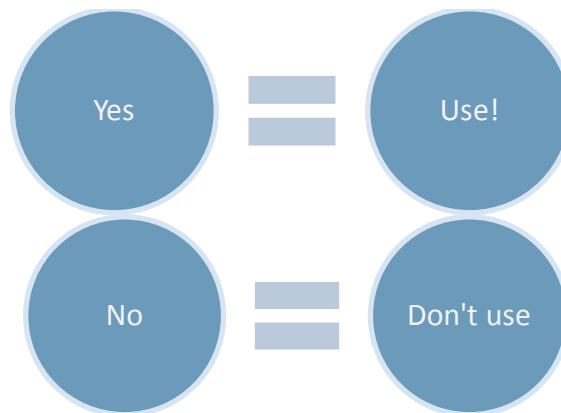
Paired Choice Preference Assessment

- Show the child/youth two items

- Record which item child selects

- Keep presenting two items together until you have paired all items

- Count how many times each item was chosen

Chosen more times = Higher preference
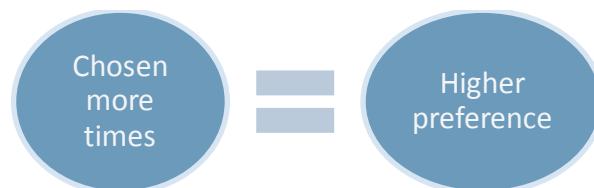
Let's say we have 4 items: basketball, drink, laptop and video game. We need to present every item with every other item. A black border means that was the item chosen by the youth.

How many times was each item chosen? The highest number would indicate the item you should use as your reinforcer.
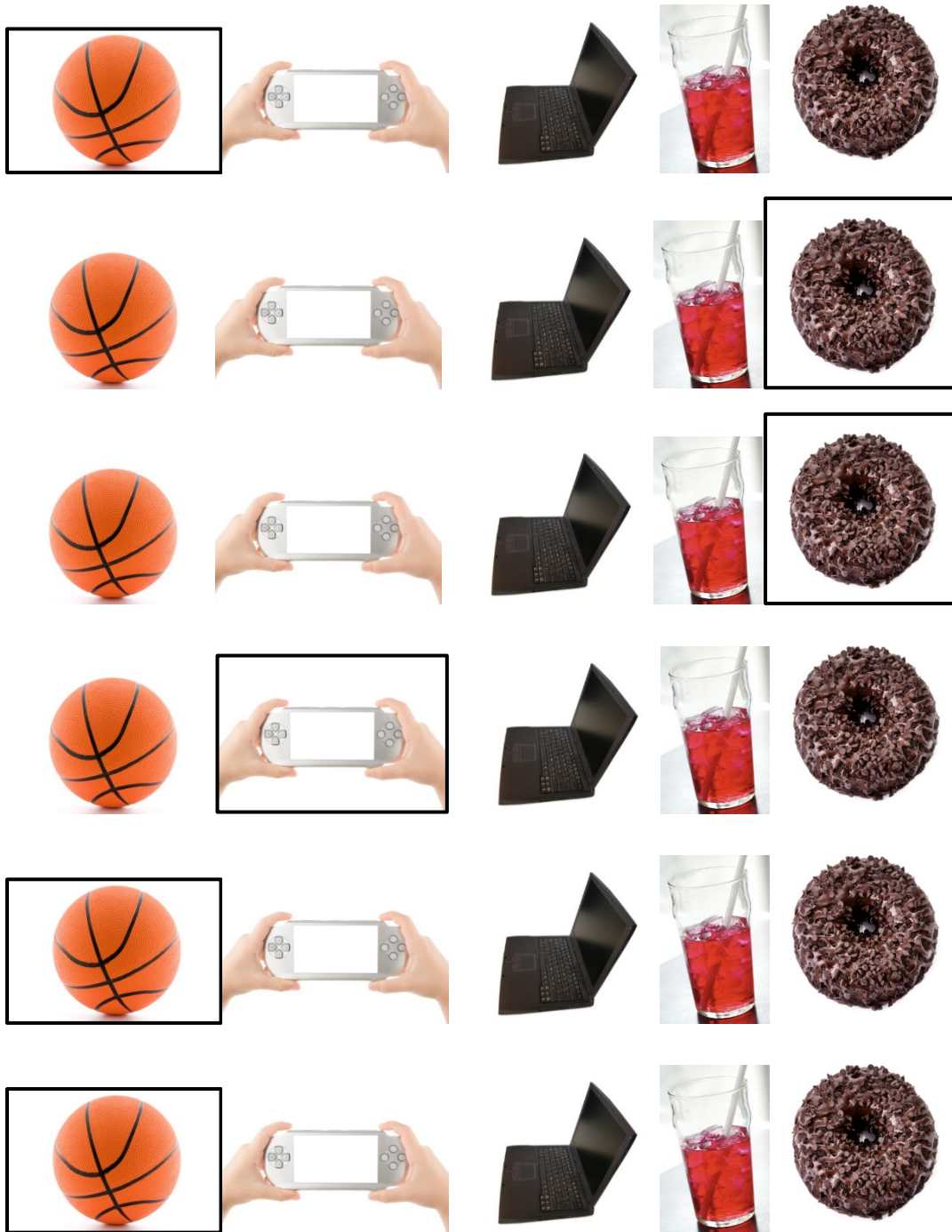
Basketball – 3

Video Game – 2

Laptop – 1

Drink – 0

Multiple Stimulus
With Replacement

- Show array of multiple items (5-10 items)
- Record which item child/youth picks
- Show all these items again, multiple times (5-10 times)
    - You will see greater differences between the more frequently and less frequently chosen items if you present more times

- Count how many times each item was chosen

How many times was each item chosen? The highest number would indicate the item you should use as your reinforcer.
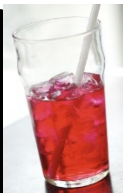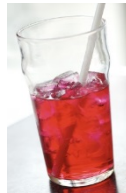
Basketball – 3

Donut - 2

Video Game – 1

Without Replacement

- Show array of multiple items (5-10 items)
- Record which item child/youth picks
- Take the item the child/youth picked OUT of the array
- Show array of the remaining items (all items, minus the one that was picked)
- Keep doing this until all items are picked
- This gives a rank of preference
    - The first picked item is highest preferred
    - The last picked item is lowest preferred

What would be the rank of this assessment?

1) Video game
2) Basketball
3) Donut
4) Laptop
5) Drink

Caregiver/Teacher Interview

Asking people who are close to your child/youth for ideas on what he/she might enjoy could be helpful. You could ask siblings, teachers, friends, coaches or service providers. There is an interview called Reinforcement Assessment for Individuals with Severe Disabilities (R.A.I.S.D) that can be found on the internet. You could also use checklists or rating scales.

Services and supports offered in partnership with: