

Preference Assessments for Non-speaking individuals

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What?

Preference Assessments (PA) are used to determine items, activities, or people that are highly preferred and MAY function as reinforcers for appropriate behavior

- ★ Highly preferred item/activity $\neq$ reinforcer
- ★ An item/activity is only considered a reinforcer if it increases behavior
- ★ Remember: The goal of any plan to decrease unwanted behavior includes also increasing an appropriate replacement behavior



Why?

Research indicates that treatment plans with arbitrarily selected reinforcers are not as effective as plans with empirically-selected reinforcers.

- ★ Cannella et al. (2005) noted that PA have led to decreases in problem behavior and increases in appropriate behavior through the identification and subsequent use of highly preferred items or activities.
 - ★ Ultimate goal: To create behavior plans that are both empirically-based and effective
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Why?

Preferences can change over time and we need to adjust accordingly

- ★ Can do PA hourly, daily, monthly, etc.

The ability to make choices can increase independence and self-determination



How?

- ★ PAs are a very flexible tool
 - Can be tailored to the developmental, cognitive or communicative needs of the child.
- ★ Two main types of PAs to conduct:
 - Direct
 - Indirect
- ★ There are distinct advantages and disadvantages to both



Indirect

- ★ Straight forward conducting and completing
- ★ Interview- caregiver, teacher, etc
- ★ Checklist
- ★ Observing
- ★ Reinforcement Menu- individual picks from choices given
- ★ Results can be used as a starting point for more direct methods



Direct Assessments

- ★ Direct measures use the systematic presentation of items and specific data collection to determine which items are highly preferred and may be a potential reinforcer.

- ★ Five types of direct preference assessment
 - Free operant
 - Paired Choice/Forced Choice
 - Single stimulus
 - **Multi Stimulus without replacement (MSWO)**
 - Multi Stimulus with replacement (MSW)



Direct Assessments

Research has suggested that Multiple-Stimulus without Replacement (MSWO) and Paired Choice/Forced Choice are the two most effective and reliable procedures for determining highly preferred items that also act as reinforcers



First steps for any PA

Select the items to evaluate and include 1-2 low preferred items.

- ★ Could use items identified in the indirect assessment
- ★ Should consider accessibility, resources, etc.
- ★ Generally 6-8 items



First steps for any PA

Determine whether the actual item, activity, person or a visual representation (e.g., photo, written description) will be utilized.

- ★ If actual items, identify the amount of time available for item engagement.
- ★ Typically 1~2 minutes

Finally, the specific type of PA (and data collection system) needs to be determined. Today **MSWO**



Additional Considerations

During a PA, the individual should have the opportunity to play with and understand any new/novel toys.

Adult attention should be available and provided if desired.

- ★ Talk to individual
- ★ Play with toy, if desired

No demands should be placed on the individual and let them play how they chose with the provided items.

Mild problem behavior (e.g., throwing of toys, yelling) should be ignored.



Multi-Stimulus Without Replacement (MSWO)



Steps to complete an MSWO

- ★ Identify items to evaluate
- ★ Determine the amount of time individual can interact (if they get to interact) with items, person (pictures or names), activity (pictures or words)
- ★ Put an array of items in front of the individual
 - Ensure individual knows how to use all items and knows the picture/name
- ★ State, “Today we are going to make some choices.”
- ★ Briefly present unknown items for familiarity



Steps to complete an MSWO

- ★ Direct student to pick an item.
 - “Pick one” OR “Which one do you want to play with?”
- ★ Allow individual to engage for specified amount of time.
- ★ When engagement is over, remove item, stop activity, remove person from individual (pictures/words)
- ★ Reorder array and present without previously selected item
- ★ If no item selected:
 - Provide additional verbal prompts
 - Block attempts to select more than one item.



MSWO considerations

Strengths:

- Can be completed quickly should preferences need to be frequently evaluated.
- Can get information about relative standing of all items

Weaknesses:

- Requires some prerequisite skills: visual scanning, etc.
- Could evoke problem behavior when a highly preferred item is removed and no longer available for selection.
- “Save the best for last”

Multi-Stimulus Without Replacement (MSWO) Data Sheet

Multiple-Stimulus Without Replacement (MSWO) Preference Assessment

Name: _____
Date: _____

Selection Order	Items
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

Multi-Stimulus Without Replacement (MSWO)





Remember!

Preference Assessments help us identify highly preferred items, NOT a guaranteed reinforcer.

- Collect data and determine if behavior changes when given access to highly preferred item



References/Resources

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THANK YOU

