

ENGAGING IN PREFERRED INTERESTS:

A Self-Help Checklist for YAP Staff

Explanation: **Engaging a child or adult in interactions involving a preferred interest or “passion” is a powerful and necessary way to support social, communicative, and cognitive development.**

This activity is fundamental to our work because:

- it builds the security and trust needed for sound mental health and resilience
- it encourages self-motivation and self-determination, rather than dependence on prompts or artificial rewards
- it fosters self-confidence and self-esteem by demonstrating respect and belief in the person’s intellect
- it opens the door to better observations and understanding of the individual we are supporting, so that we can continue to learn and improve our efforts.

Caution: **Remember that preferred interests are for reciprocal, mutual engagement, not one-way behavior control. Do not manipulate and withhold them as rewards or punishments for “behaviors,” or you will undermine their effectiveness in the key areas bulleted above.**

Directions: **To help you consider appropriate activities for engaging in preferred interests with the person you are supporting, you may wish to review this Self-Help Checklist before spending time with them. You can also use it to record and remember successful activities that occurred during a session.** The examples below are suggestions only, and may not be relevant or appropriate to all clients. If you are engaging with your client’s preferred interests in ways not listed, feel free to record them under “Other.” Keeping this Checklist is NOT required of YAP staff; it was created as a reminder and a guide.

The preferred interest(s) of the person I am supporting is/are:

Today this interest may be/has been engaged in the following ways:

- Incorporated into **school work** (Examples *may include but are not limited to*: math problems rewritten to involve preferred interest (PI); spelling words used in sentences that involve PI; books for book reports chosen to reflect PI; PI creatively incorporated into new subjects or projects; attendance at college lecture addressing PI; etc.)

- Incorporated into **recreation** (Examples: client supported to share PI with peers on playground; client uses PI to earn Scout merit badge; client attends an afterschool club based on PI; client makes an active game of PI, such as by taking a “power walk” that involves passing favorite street signs; etc.)

- Used as a means of **communication** (Examples: client encouraged to increase “communication volleys” through use of PI; client supported to use preferred music to share emotions; PI incorporated in art therapy; client supported to choose and discuss PI-related books and videos; client supported to role play and invent scenarios based on characters in a PI; etc.)

- Shared to build **social skills** (Examples: Social Stories based on PI; client supported to teach others about PI, as in school “show and tell”; client supported to share PI by inviting peers to view a video or play a game; client supported to interact with peers in context of building a hobby or collection based on PI; etc.)

- Incorporated into **self-help and daily living activities** (Examples: client supported to decorate and maintain his/her room to honor a PI; client visits a library or store to obtain materials related to PI; client encouraged to choose and dress self in appropriate clothing, such as an illustrated t-shirt, reflecting PI; client supported to follow activity check-list themed to PI; client learns community mobility skills which increase access to PI; etc.)

- Incorporated into **prevocational/vocational activities** (Examples: client explores jobs and community places related to PI; client engages in community volunteerism involving a PI, such as care of environment or animals; projects selected in vocational or postsecondary courses to reflect PI; client identifies and uses knowledge related to a PI on the job; client supported to share a PI with co-workers; etc.)

- Other** (any other types of activities in which you are engaging with a child or adult on the autism spectrum around his/her preferred interests)