Guidelines for Conducting Preference Assessment

Dedicated to:
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(1927-2001)

Guidelines

• Select options that relate to meaningful decision in the person’s life
• Conduct preference assessment in the context of the student’s typical routine
• Have someone who knows the person well participate in the preference assessment
• Use the assessment method that best matches the context

Expand options

• Interview caregivers
• Brainstorm with planning team
• Review community options in newspaper
• Conduct ecological inventories

Consideration: Symbolic or Nonsymbolic?

• Many researchers focus on objects to be used or consumed; no symbolism needed
• Can limit meaningfulness of preference assessment
• Alternative: introduce simple symbols
• Or, note reactions while experiencing a setting or activity

When and Where to Conduct Preference Assessment

• Offer selection just prior to activity
• In context of typical routine
• Note selections over time to determine preference

Who conducts preference assessment?

• Advantages of knowing student
  – Aware of more potential options to offer
  – May recognize subtle expressions of preference
  – Student may be more likely to communicate preference
• Advantages of someone new
  – May offer different options
  – Preferences may interact with social context
Planning the method: Number of options

- Advantages of single option:
  - Easily embedded in a typical routine
  - Does not require choice response
  - Activities and settings can only be sampled one at a time

- Advantages of using an array (e.g., 2 choices):
  - Selection may be clearer to interpret than general response to 1
  - May be more efficient
  - Can indicate preference hierarchies

Planning the Method: Defining a response

- Need for objective definition of a response to avoid projecting bias
- Observable, measurable
  - e.g., make physical contact with object; approaches object, duration of participation in activity
  - Response to indicate dislike?
  - “Repair” response

Planning the Method: Access to Option

- Sometimes use brief sampling
- Other times, allow access to activity or object for typical duration

Ethical concerns

- Identify reinforcers
  - Use to increase skill
  - Decrease problem behavior
  - Deny access unless earned

Use some contingently, but be reflective on that use. Rather, use it to enrich environment and add to quality of life.

Preference assessment does not replace providing opportunities for choice.