

Motivation: Unlocking Your Child's Potential

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Motivation plays a significant role in teaching children important skills such as self-help and the ability to independently complete routines at home. When children are motivated to access an item or an activity, they are more likely to pay attention to the instructions being presented and to engage in the desired behaviours. Identifying items or activities that are motivating will help your child to complete a known task or learn a new skill. Children's interests are often short lived, and it may be necessary to monitor what they are interested in and rotate preferred items often to maintain their motivation to participate. This would provide your child with an opportunity to switch the preferred items if he is no longer motivated. Monitoring your child's motivation will help increase the likelihood that he will perform to the best of his ability. If your child chooses the same item several times, you can try to add something to make his time with it a little different. For example, if your child was playing with a ball and bouncing it, you could try rolling it or hiding it in an attempt to make it more fun. Your child may prefer

different items with different people, and this could be related to how you engage in the activity with the child. This sometimes happens with social activities such as singing songs, playing games, or tickles. Keep in mind that your child may find your social attention motivating, regardless of the activity.

There are a variety of strategies that you can use to identify which toys, items, or activities may be motivating for your child. While your child has free access to a variety of items, you can watch to see what your child reaches for, and whether he shows signs of enjoyment when playing with it. Another option is to put out some items and see which one your child chooses first or with which he plays the longest. Watch what your child does with each item, and what aspects of the item he enjoys. It is likely that your child will like other items that are similar in some way. For example, you may consider items that are similar in sensory function. If your child shows interest in a toy that makes noise, try introducing him to musical instruments, talking books, or computer games with sound effects. You could also find items



that look similar, as well as toys related to a favourite theme. It is important to expand the variety of your child's interests, as well as to limit his access to them. You may find your child will get bored of a particular toy or activity if he has access to it on a regular basis. The value of the item may decrease. For example, if your child has just eaten five cookies, the value of an additional cookie

is not as high compared to when he has not had a cookie in a few days. With this principle in mind, it is best to keep your child's access to his favourite items brief. This will maintain the value of the item over time. Identifying, expanding, and monitoring your child's motivation is necessary to ensure that your child continues to perform known skills and to learn new skills at home.

Motivation: A Parent's Perspective

An interview with Karen L. parent of a child at TPAS

1. What are the actions that you observe your son engaging in that tell you he is motivated?

I can tell he is motivated because he will usually run toward something he likes. Other things I observe when he is motivated are jumping up and down, reaching for the item and smiling. And, of course, if I try to take it back, he does not let me.

2. How do you involve yourself in motivating activities?

I always try to take turns with him playing with favourite toys or games. If he really likes the toy, and it is difficult to share, I will take short turns or trade him for a similar toy. I will also

describe what he is doing so he is hearing the labels for things. I like to model different ways that he can use the toys he likes and sometimes he will copy me.

3. Are there any motivating items that you reserve for teaching certain skills?

No, my son tends to be motivated by different things from day to day or sometimes hour to hour! What I often do is use an item he is really motivated by in the moment as part of a "First-Then" statement in order to get him to complete certain routines. For example, if he is playing dinosaurs, but it is time for dinner, I will say "First – Dinner, Then – Dinosaurs".

This way he knows he will get to come back to it and I know it is motivating for him.

4. Does your son have certain daily routines that he enjoys and that are already motivating for him?

He enjoys reading a book before his bath or playtime after dinner.

5. Do you find that you are able to incorporate teaching of new skills into these enjoyable routines?

Yes, it is easier to teach him skills we are working on during these routines. I like to ask the therapists at TPAS what he is working on there so that we can practice at home. Something



I am always working on is improving his articulation. This is definitely easier when he is motivated by an activity and really wants to say a particular word. During playtime we have also been working on using a loud and quiet voice.

Parent Education and Support Services:

Building ABA into Family Routines workshop

Family routines provide convenient, natural opportunities for positive parent-child interactions. Teaching within enjoyable family routines can create situations where a child is more open to learning resulting in better generalization and maintenance of skills and improved family life. In the *Building ABA into Family Routines* workshop we review the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and discuss how these strategies can be used to teach your child in everyday family routines.

Parents will have the opportunity to develop a social or communication goal for their child, participate in small group activities and practice delivering prompting and reinforcement techniques.



Prerequisite workshop: ABA Key Terms
Please contact your TPAS Family Support Coach to register

Parent Resources

- » **ConnectABILITY:** Reinforcement article <http://connectability.ca/2010/09/23/reinforcement/>
- » **ConnectABILITY:** Reinforcement workshop - A workshop to help parents and caregivers influence and manage behaviour <http://connectability.ca/2010/09/25/reinforcement-2/>
- » **The Hanen Centre:** The Power of Using Everyday Routines to Promote Young Children's Language and Social Skills <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Power-of-Using-Everyday-Routines.aspx>
- » **Book:** Incentives for Change: Motivating People with Autism Spectrum Disorders to Learn and Gain Independence Lara Delmolino & Sandra L. Harris (2004)

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