

Motivating and Increasing Participation through Rewards

Motivating children on the spectrum is a VERY important part of their individual programme. Self-motivation is often very difficult for someone with an ASD especially when they can't see the "payoff" at the end. As teachers we need to be creative in motivating these children to work as they are unlikely to be motivated by the things that motivate other children. Rewards need to be highly motivating to the individual child – using a child's special interest is a fantastic reward.

Most children on the spectrum need to be motivated using 'their currency' as the reward – which is usually their special interest. If you are unsure what their special interests are just observe what they do when given free time, or talk to families about what they do at home. It can be anything from Lego, collecting figurines, Star Wars, dinosaurs, sensory activities, movement, talking about a topic, technology, YouTube, DVDs, reading, jumping on trampoline and so much more. But remember... special interests change so too should your rewards! Rewards can wear out, so we need to change regularly and keep up the positives to keep up the motivation levels.

Once you have established 'their currency' you need to work out a system that is clear to everyone (home and school). To be clear when the child gets rewarded it needs to be either time, tasks or token reward systems – you can also use a combination of systems. Depending on the age of the child you will need to decide how often everyday they will get the reward to keep them engaged and motivated.

Time Rewards

In my experience, children 0-5 years – give reward every 15-30 minutes; primary age – give reward each session; secondary age – give reward once a day.

Task Rewards

Ensure the tasks are achievable and will not take too long, if they are too hard this can result in a meltdown or shutdown.

Ensure you do not over reward or it will wear out or they will get so involved in the reward they will find it very hard to return to the tasks you want them to do. Sometimes this is trial and error but I would say 5-10 minutes reward time is usually enough.

Excerpts adapted from The Teacher Assistants Big Blue Book of Ideas by Sue Larkey and Anna Tullemans.

Token Reward Systems

Token systems work much like a typical 'star chart' that many of you would use for other children. Tokens are highly VISUAL for a child with an ASD. They can see exactly what they have achieved and how much more they need to get to earn their reward, this can support inhibitory control.

Put a visual of the reward on the square at the bottom of the token card. Focusing on just one behaviour at a time, for every good model of that behaviour praise the child and get them to move a token from the left side to the right side. For every bad model of that behaviour move a token back to the left side. When all of the tokens are on the right side let the child have their reward and start the system from the beginning again.



NEVER take away a child's special interest as a punishment for non-co-operation!

Why should you NEVER take away a child's special interest as a punishment for non-cooperation?

If you take away their special interest and use it as a punishment it rarely works as a behaviour modification method and could result in escalating behaviours. It is better to use the special interest to reward appropriate behaviour. Their special interest keeps them calm and relaxed, it allows them to release emotions and actually motivates them to face the new challenges.

It is much more effective to say:

*WHEN you have done a,b,c THEN you can do "preferred activity", than
"If YOU don't do a,b,c THEN you will NOT get "preferred activity".*

AN EXAMPLE

I once observed a boy whose special interest was a climbing frame in the school yard. He loved to play on the equipment and was the only time he engaged spontaneously and appropriately with the other children. The school decided if he didn't complete his class work he would miss out on 5-10 minutes on the climbing frame. To make it even more stressful he had to stand and watch the other children play without him. The school quickly realised the strategy wasn't working and asked for my advice. I explained removing special interests as a punishment rarely worked.

Useful Resources on Special Interests and Rewards

Teacher Assistants Big Blue Book of Ideas: By Sue Larkey and Anna Tullemans

Companion to the Teacher Assistants Big Red Book of Ideas. Hundreds of new strategies to try. Social skills: playgrounds, friendships, building self-esteem, bullying. In the classroom: getting on task, adapting tasks and exams, building independence. Managing anxiety and behaviour.

CODE B16 \$45 (incl P & H)



The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome: By Dr Tony Attwood

The definitive handbook for anyone affected by Asperger's Syndrome (AS), it brings together a wealth of information for children through to adults. Essential reading for families and individuals as well as teachers, professionals and employers coming in contact with people with AS. This book is a must for anyone who needs to know about this condition.

CODE B13 \$55 (incl P & H)

