Why Conduct Preference Assessment?

- Children and youth with developmental disabilities may have difficulty communicating about likes and dislikes or may show limited interests.
  - Preference assessment (PA) helps us learn about likes and dislikes, without the requirement of communication.
  - PA may identify new preferred items/activities.
- When we are clear on likes, we know what rewards to give for good behavior and what to avoid giving after problem behavior.
  - Some preferred items/activities that are given after a behavior increase the likelihood that the behavior will happen again in the future. These are known as reinforcers.
- When we are clear on dislikes, we know what might trigger problem behavior. Triggers for behavior are known as antecedents.
- Because likes change over time, continued PA is important. Anytime your child seems bored with items, it may be time for a new PA.

How Preference Assessments Are Conducted.

- During our interview, we conducted an informal preference assessment when I asked you to tell me about your child’s preferences.
- At home, you can learn a lot about preferences by observing what your child interacts with or chooses to do, as well as what your child refuses.
- In a future appointment, we will conduct a formal preference assessment that will involve presenting items/activities and carefully observing behavior.
  - We may observe what items are selected, as well as how much interaction or behavior is associated with each item.

How Preference Assessment Relates to Treatment.

- Assessment of preferences is a first step in development of an effective behavior management plan.
- Conducting a preference assessment is a good opportunity to establish rapport with your child and allow your child to become comfortable in this clinical setting.
- We may need to limit access to certain items so that these can be used to motivate positive behavior. If your child can access the item freely across the day, it will not serve as a good motivator.
- The best motivators are small. For example, a bite of preferred food or a 2-minute break with a preferred toy or video may be good motivators.