

What Is It?

Using children's interests in the classroom is an antecedent strategy to prevent challenging behavior. It is a universal and an individual strategy. Children's interests can be incorporated into class experiences, increasing engagement and enjoyment, and supporting children's active participation. Interests can include events, objects, people, and activities. Because children within any given classroom will have differing interests, it is not possible to incorporate every child's interests across every activity of a program day. Rather, the goal of using children's interests within a classroom is to ensure that across a given day or week, all children's interests have been considered and planned for.

When to Use It

- As much as possible across daily activities and routines.
- When the majority of children do not seem interested or engaged in a particular activity.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Identify children's interests by observing what activities they prefer and gravitate towards.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Ask children's family members about activities children enjoy at home and in their communities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Write down or keep a list of children's preferred items and activities gathered from observations and family input. Brainstorm ways in which these preferences may be embedded across the program day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Embed children's interests across the program day and week in meaningful ways.
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Continue to assess children's interests regularly.

Example

Ms. Flores is a preschool educator. She has become increasingly interested in "interest-based learning," where children's interests are used as a foundation for learning experiences and educators expand on children's natural curiosity. Over the past week, Ms. Flores noticed that construction has started at a building across the street. This has caught children's attention during outdoor time on the play court. Many children gather at the side of the play court facing the construction and ask questions about the activities and individuals working at the site. These questions often carry into the classroom from outdoor time. As a result, Ms. Flores decides to build off of the children's current interest by reading a book about construction vehicles, placing printed architectural drawings at the art table, and adding various objects to the block construction area (caution tape, construction worker hats, toy tools). Knowing that children's interests change over time, Ms. Flores continues to monitor which activities children tend to gravitate toward during structured and unstructured learning opportunities, which activities children demonstrate enjoyment with, and what questions and comments children are bringing with them to the classroom.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- Ensure ongoing class activities and identified interests can occur together.
- Identify several items or activities of interest and vary their incorporation to maintain engagement.
- Offer choices of items of interest (see "Universal Choice-making" intervention guide).
- Modify materials and activities as needed to account for a child's changing interests.
- For information about how to individualize this strategy for a child who would benefit from additional support, see the "Using a Child's Preferences" intervention guide.

Resources

Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, D. W. (2012). [Meta-analysis of studies incorporating the interests of young children with autism spectrum disorders into early intervention practices](#). *Autism Research and Treatment*, 2012, 1-10.

Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (n.d.). [Child preferences](#).

Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (n.d.). [Following children's lead](#).