

# LEARNING TOGETHER



## Specialized Services At Your Fingertips

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### Introduction

WE now have one year under our collective belts in a pandemic world while also nearing the end of winter. With the whole world online even our very own [Warton Willie](#) made his spring prediction via web cam, promising us all that spring will be here in just six weeks. In saying that however we constantly seeking new ways to fill the time in our days before we can truly enjoy the great outdoors. One of the biggest challenges we face is providing meaningful ways for those we support to also keep boredom at bay and so we must be patient and creative when developing and presenting activities. In this edition of 'Learning Together' we bring you an [Interview](#) with a Recreational Therapist for a dive into why recreation is an important component of all of our lives and how to ensure you are following an individual's lead when coming up with recreational activities. This edition will outline what naturalistic teaching is where an individual has an opportunity to engage in preferred activities while you, the caregiver embeds learning within the context of the activity.

### What Is a Recreational Therapist?

Recreational Therapists engage individuals in therapeutic activities. These therapists use a variety of modalities including arts and crafts, drama, music, and dance, sports and games, aquatics; and community outings to help maintain or improve an individual's physical, social, and emotional well-being.

## SLEEVES UP



### For Family

When Your Turn Comes,  
ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVE  
for the COVID-19 Vaccine

#sleevesupON

### Naturalistic Teaching

Naturalistic Teaching or Natural Environment Teaching (NET) involves using materials and other activities which an individual finds interesting or enjoyable and arranging the environment using those materials or activities to build new or improve skills. It is all about learning through interaction or play in a natural setting rather than in a structured teaching environment.

With naturalistic teaching learning is not just occurring at a desk or table, but in a variety of environments and locations while the individual is going about their day. Teaching can occur at home, school, the playground or even in the grocery store, at the bank, or any setting that is directly related to the skills being taught. While structured teaching sessions are effective for building skills, naturalistic teaching is a great companion to help improve generalization, spontaneity, and contextual learning.

The goal is to look for "teachable moments."

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when the individual displays interest and excitement about a particular person, item, or activity and take advantage of these moments to teach and build skills. These moments create more opportunities for learning which in turn improves the proficiency of any skills being taught.

Though naturalistic teaching is less structured in design it does require some planning and preparation, mainly around the environment itself. It is important to enrich the environment with a variety of items and activities that will peak the individual's interest. If you are teaching a skill in the community, make sure to bring anything you will need to make the outing a successful learning experience.

#### Example:

Jessie has been learning to write letters and words. Overnight there was a snowstorm and one of Jessie's favourite activities in playing in the snow. Caregivers can prepare squirt bottles with dyed water which can then be squirted on the snow colouring or writing on it. As Jessie colours on the snow caregivers can start spelling words or letters and ask Jessie to do the same. Caregivers can change the colours as needed or have Jessie help mix new colours to keep things fun and interesting for her.

Always remember to keep your naturalistic teaching sessions fun, noisy, boisterous, full of language and movement, and **stay flexible!**

## Naturalistic Teaching Tips & Tricks



### Assess

Consider individual's skills, functioning, and, most importantly, their interests



### Make a plan

Based on your assessment loosely plan out activities



### Prepare

Prep materials and objects based on the activities planned, always have backup activities just in case



### Follow the leader

Introduce the activities and follow the individuals lead, let them guide the teaching



### Teach

Provide assistance if needed and teach or work on goals through their interaction with the activity and environment



### Be flexible

Just roll with it! Do not worry if things don't go as planned let the individual guide the learning



### Commit

The more engaged or interested you are with an activity the more engaged the interested the individual may become



### Spark joy

Choose activities that bring joy to the individual while teaching and most of all have fun!

## Naturalistic Teaching Activity Ideas!

Enjoy these pictures of a few activities you can set up in the environment for teaching. Remember! Create activities that are aligned with your individual's skills, functioning, likes, interests, and teaching goal. If you are teaching colours and your individual loves painting create an activity with that in mind. If the goal is fine motor development set up an activity that will align with that goal.

**25 WAYS TO GET MOVING AT HOME**

American Heart Association

- Run in place for 30 seconds
- Dance party for 1 minute
- Hot lava! Keep a balloon in the air without touching the ground (make it harder by only using heads or elbows)
- Do the hokey pokey
- Stretch your hands high over your head
- Arm circles forward for 30 seconds, arm circles backward for 30 seconds
- Stand on one leg, put your hands up, put your hands out to the side
- 5 lunges on the right leg, 5 lunges on the left leg
- Practice spelling, do a squat for every vowel
- Run in place for 30 seconds, check your heart rate
- Ball toss spelling practice. Toss the ball and say a letter then toss the ball to someone else to say the next letter
- Practice math problems, do a jumping jack every time the answer is an even number
- 20 leg lifts
- Read standing up
- Stand up, touch your toes
- See how many squats you can do in 15 seconds
- Stretch your head
- One-minute yoga
- Standing mountain climbers for 30 seconds
- Practice spelling by doing a jumping jack for each letter
- 30-second plank
- High knees for 30 seconds

heart.org/KidsActivities

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If you would like to learn more about naturalistic teaching watch this [YouTube video by Autism Live](#).



## Preference Assessments

What is a preference assessment? It is a tool to help assess what items are preferred to an individual which could lead to establishing said item as a reinforcer. The higher preferred the item is to a person, the more likely it will act as a motivator to complete tasks to gain access to the identified item. Preference assessments can also be used to provide exposure to toys/activities/edible items or to understand what the individual want to do that day. There are many types of preference assessments available but forced choice and free operant preference assessments are two easy formats that can be incorporated into daily use.

### Forced Choice:

Forced choice preference assessments are a simple and easy way to identify a preferred activity or item. The basic concept for this type of assessment is to encourage the person to select 1 of 2 items/activities presented to them. The assessment itself can be delivered in multiple ways- through visual representation (physical item, picture of item/activity) or verbally. For example, "Do you want Rice Krispies or Cheerios?" or "Do you want to go to the park or the beach?". If you are presenting a choice between two edible items using a physical representation, it is encouraged to offer a small piece of the selected edible item as a "freebie". The same rule of thumb goes for toys, you can allow the individual between 10-15 seconds to engage with the item following selection. Remember, the items or activities you are presenting must be **available**, must be **known** to the person and must select only **one** item. Forced choice assessments can be completed once to quickly establish choice or can be completed multiple times to establish a hierarchy of preferred items if the individual has challenges when presented with more than two options in front of them.

### Free Operant:

This type of preference assessment is a great way to find out what is preferred or highly preferred for people who may have limited to none known preferred activities/toys or to **try new things**. Free operant preference assessments look a lot like "free play", so if you have a loved one who experiences challenges relinquishing items after 10-15 seconds like in other preference assessments, this is a great alternative! Between 5-8 toys or activities are placed around the room for the person to engage in. Your role as an observer, is to mark down what toy the individual gravitated to first and how long they engaged in the selected item. The longer they engage in an item, the more likely that item is preferred. List what the individual naturally gravitated towards and engages in as they explore the various items.

# DO'S AND DON'TS

## OF PREFERENCE ASSESSMENTS

	
Include items that you think are highly preferred	Delay providing access to selected item
Use only items that are readily available	Provide choice items that are not available
Be prepared, have all materials set-up	
Allow time to engage with the item	Rush the preference assessment
Ensure you have adequate time	
Keep neutral expression when making choices	Influence their choices
What's preferred today may not be tomorrow	Offer the same items every day
Provide small pieces of edible items during choice phase	Give larger quantities of an edible item during choice phase



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