



BONUS GUIDE

Reinforcer Expansion Guide

WIDEN WHAT MOTIVATES THE LEARNER



THE CASE FOR VARIETY

Why Expand Reinforcers?

A learner with only one or two reinforcers is fragile to teach. Widening the pool keeps motivation strong and instruction moving.



Narrow Interests Limit Teaching

Few reinforcers mean few chances to run trials and build skills.



Satiation Weakens One Reward

A single reinforcer loses value fast when used over and over.



Variety Keeps Motivation High

Rotating strong reinforcers sustains responding across long sessions.



New Reinforcers Open Doors

Each new interest unlocks new activities, settings, and skills to teach.

MORE REINFORCERS MEANS MORE WAYS TO TEACH.

PREFERENCE ASSESSMENTS

Find What Motivates Now

Preferences shift often, so measure them directly. These three formats move from quick observation to precise ranking.



Free-Operant

Watch the learner play freely; note what they choose and stay with.



MSWO

Present an array; remove each chosen item to rank preference order.



Paired-Stimulus

Offer two items at a time as forced choices to compare strength.



START HERE

Begin with free-operant observation to gather candidates, then run an MSWO to rank them.

STEP BY STEP

How to Run an MSWO

A Multiple-Stimulus Without Replacement assessment turns a handful of items into a clear preference ranking in minutes.

1

Lay Out the Array

Set 5 to 8 items in a row, evenly spaced, at the learner's eye level.

**SETUP**

Equal spacing.

2

Let the Child Pick

Say "pick one" and allow brief access to the chosen item.

3

Remove the Chosen Item

Take that item out of the array so it cannot be selected again.

4

Re-Present the Rest

Rotate the remaining items and prompt another choice.

5

Repeat Until Empty

Continue choosing and removing until every item is selected.

6

Record the Order

The selection sequence is your high-to-low preference ranking.

**RESULT**

Ranked list.

CREATING VALUE

Stimulus-Stimulus Pairing

You can build brand-new reinforcers. Pair a neutral item with an already-strong one until the neutral item becomes reinforcing on its own.

1**Pick the Pair**

Choose a neutral target item and a proven, powerful reinforcer.

2**Present Together**

Deliver the neutral item paired with the strong reinforcer, repeatedly.

3**Keep It Non-Contingent**

Pair freely at first; do not require any response to earn it.

4**Test for Transfer**

Offer the neutral item alone and watch for approach or engagement.

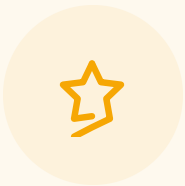
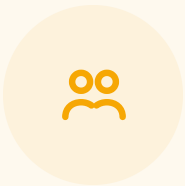
**GOOD TO KNOW**

Many pairings may be needed. Fade the strong reinforcer slowly once the new item shows value.

COVER EVERY DOMAIN

Expand Across Every Category

Do not let the menu skew toward one type. Grow reinforcers in each category so options exist for any setting or activity.

				
Food	Toys	Sensory	Activities	Social
Introduce small new tastes paired with favorites.	Teach play with a new tangible each week.	Sample lights, textures, and movement inputs.	Build routines around outings and games.	Pair praise and play with strong rewards.



AIM
Keep at least two ranked reinforcers active in every category at all times.



THE HIGHEST-VALUE CATEGORY

Build Social Reinforcers

Social attention is the most portable reinforcer of all. Give it value by pairing it with items the learner already loves.

1

Pair Praise With Strong Rewards

Deliver enthusiastic praise as you hand over a top reinforcer.



TYPE

Verbal.

2

Add Playful Physical Touch

Layer high-fives, tickles, and gentle roughhousing the learner enjoys.

3

Use Songs and Games

Peekaboo, chase, and favorite songs make you the source of fun.

4

Fade the Tangible

Gradually thin the item so social attention carries the value alone.



WHY IT MATTERS

Strong social reinforcers travel everywhere and require no props to deliver.

PLAY AS A REINFORCER ENGINE

Expand Play & Leisure

Teaching new play skills is one of the richest ways to add reinforcers. Every new game a learner enjoys becomes a reward.

1

Model the New Play

Show the toy or game with genuine energy so it looks fun.

2

Prompt Participation

Guide the learner to try one step, then fade your help.

3

Reinforce Trying

Reward any approach to novel play, not just correct use.



START SMALL

One new toy at a time, briefly.



VARY IT

Rotate cause-and-effect, pretend, and building.



PLAY ALONG

Join in so play stays social.

KEEP REWARDS POTENT

Rotate & Menu Your Reinforcers

Once you have a wide pool, manage it deliberately. Rotation and right-sizing keep every reinforcer working session after session.

**BUILD A MENU**

Keep a ranked, current list of top reinforcers.

**ROTATE OFTEN**

Swap items across sessions to prevent satiation.

**MATCH EFFORT**

Bigger tasks earn bigger, stronger reinforcers.

**RESERVE THE BEST**

Save the most powerful reinforcers for hard, new, or effortful targets.



Let the learner choose from the menu when possible; choice itself boosts motivation.



MAKE IT A LIVING SYSTEM

Track a Reinforcer Inventory

A reinforcer list is only useful if it stays current. Log each item and re-check it, because preferences shift constantly.

**Record the Item**

Name each reinforcer clearly and specifically.

**Tag the Category**

Note food, toy, sensory, activity, or social.

**Rate the Strength**

Mark high, medium, or low from your last assessment.

**Date Last Checked**

Stamp when you last confirmed the preference.

**Re-Assess Regularly**

Re-run preference checks every few weeks.

**CONNECT YOUR DATA**

Store the inventory alongside your AbaTools Data Collection system for one shared record.

TROUBLESHOOTING

"They Only Want One Thing"

A single fixed interest is common and workable. Use that strong reinforcer as a bridge to broaden the pool.

DO

- ✓ Pair the favorite with new items during access.
- ✓ Offer the new item slightly before the favorite.
- ✓ Reserve the favorite for teaching times only.
- ✓ Expand within the same theme or interest.

AVOID

- ✗ Removing the favorite abruptly or as punishment.
- ✗ Free, all-day access that erases its value.
- ✗ Forcing unrelated items with no bridge.
- ✗ Giving up after one failed pairing attempt.



Same-theme expansion works fast: if they love one train, add train books, train songs, and train play.



PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Implementation Checklist

Work through these actions to move from a narrow menu to a broad, durable set of reinforcers.

☐ **Run a Baseline Assessment**
Complete an MSWO to rank current preferences.

☐ **Check Every Category**
Confirm two active reinforcers in each domain.

☐ **Pair to Build New Value**
Run stimulus-stimulus pairing on neutral targets.

☐ **Strengthen Social Reinforcers**
Pair praise and play with strong rewards daily.

☐ **Maintain the Inventory**
Log items and re-assess every few weeks.

☐ **Rotate to Prevent Satiation**
Vary reinforcers across every session.

A WIDER MENU MEANS STRONGER, FASTER LEARNING.

