What I like and what I choose

A free preference and choice record from Special Learning, to fill in WITH an adult: ask the person first, in the way they communicate; for someone who does not use speech, offer real options and watch what they choose; include people who know them well; respect a "no." Preferences change, so look again. Write what the person says and does, in their own words. A formal preference assessment for a behavior support plan is the plan author's work; this record is for everyday knowing. Nothing here is a reward to earn or a choice to take away.

1. About me and who helped

The person comes first. Add what people who know them have seen.

My name	
How I like to be called	
Date we started this record	
How I communicate (words, signs, pictures, objects, photos, a device, other)	
Where and when I wanted to do this, and who I wanted with me	

Who helped fill this in, and what each person added:

Name	Relationship to me	What they added

2. How I tell you yes and no

In my words and by what I do. Check it with me and with people who know me.

What I mean	What I say or do
Yes	
No	
Maybe	
Not now	
I am done	
I want more	
I want help	
I want to be alone	

Where this comes from: NADSP Code of Ethics. DSPs are asked to help people who do not rely on speech engage using their preferred methods.

3. Things I enjoy

What I say goes in the middle. What I choose or do, and what people have seen, goes on the right.

Area	What I say	What I show, or what others have seen
Activities		
Food and drink		
People		
Places		
Music, shows and media		
Sensory: sounds, light, textures, touch, temperature		
Anything else		

4. Things I do not like or want less of

The same areas. A "no" is as useful to know as a "yes."

Area	What I say	What I show, or what others have seen
Activities		
Food and drink		
People		
Places		
Music, shows and media		
Sensory: sounds, light, textures, touch, temperature		
Anything else		

5. How I like to make choices

Offering well is half of choice. Write down what helps this person choose.

How many options at once, and in what form (words, pictures, objects, photos)	
How long I need to answer	
Best time of day for me	
Who I want with me	
What makes choosing hard	
What helps	

6. My daily routine choices

What I choose, and how I like it, through the day. Offer, do not tell.

Part of my day	My choice, and how I like it
Waking up and going to bed	
Washing, bathing and dressing	
Meals and snacks	
Free time	
Outings and the community	
Evenings and weekends	
Who helps me, and how I like support given	
Things I want to change	

7. Choice-offering record

Offer two or three options you can really give today. Write the options, what the person chose and what they did: took it, stayed with it, handed it back, moved away. A "no" or no choice is an answer; write it down. Not a test and not a reward.

Date	Area	Options offered	What I chose	What I did	With

Where this comes from: Fisher et al. (1992), Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis; DeLeon and Iwata (1996), Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. Research offers a few items at a time and records what is chosen. This sheet is a simpler, everyday version for knowing the person.

8. Review

Review date (set with me)	
Who reviews with me	
What changed since the last review	
What we will do about it	
Wants, not yet available: what I want, and who is taking it to the team	

Look again when something changes in my life or when I ask. Your state, funder or agency may set timing for the plan itself.

One-page summary: for the front of my binder

Fill this in with me, in my voice, when the record has a few weeks of entries. I get my own copy.

What I enjoy most	
What I do not like	
How I say yes and no	
How I like to choose	
How I like support given	
My routine choices	
Wants, not yet available	
Reviewed with me on	

How to fill this in, what it rests on, and one next step

Seven steps

1. Pick a good time and a comfortable place, and ask the person whether they want to do this now, who they want with them, and where. In plain words, tell them why: so that their days can have more of what they like. It is fine to stop and come back.
2. Fill in the first part: the person's name and how they like to be called, how they communicate, and who helped. Then fill in how they say yes and no, from the person first, then from people who know them, then from what you have seen.
3. Ask first, in the way the person communicates. Start open, then with options. Write what they say in their own words, in quotes. Fill in "things I enjoy" and "things I do not like" from what they tell you.
4. Offer real choices for anything the person cannot tell you in words or is unsure about. Offer two or three things you can really give, in the same order or place, wait, and write what they chose and what they did: took it, stayed with it, handed it back, moved away. Offer the others another time.
5. Do not steer and do not test. Do not say which is better, and do not use a choice as a reward or take it away. If the person turns down everything, write that, and try other options on another day.
6. Ask people who know the person what they have seen. Where it differs from what the person showed you, write both. The person's own pick is the one to follow; take any safety concern to your supervisor and the team.
7. Make the one-page summary, give the person their own copy in a form they can use, put one at the front of the binder, set a review date, and then change the day: build the choices into the schedule and offer them at every shift.

Keeping it respectful

Adults, always. Write in the person's voice ("I like," "I choose"). Use adult activities, wording and pictures. Describe what the person did and chose, not labels.

Not earned, not withheld. Things a person likes are not rewards to earn or take away. This form never makes access to a preferred thing depend on behavior. For provider-owned or controlled residential settings, the HCBS rule says people have "the freedom and support to control their own schedules and activities, and have access to food at any time," and any modification of those conditions "must be supported by a specific assessed need and justified in the person-centered service plan."

A "no" stands. Do not coax, bargain or ask again and again in the same sitting. Write the no, and offer again another day.

Preferences you cannot give today. If a choice is not available because of cost, staffing or the setting, say so honestly, write it as "wants, not yet available," and take it to your supervisor. It is an unmet preference to work on, not a wrong answer.

Risk and informed choice. The NADSP Code says to respect each person's right to make decisions and "take risks," and to support informed decision-making. If a choice worries you, tell your supervisor and the team, and keep the person in the conversation.

Privacy. The record holds personal information. Keep it where your agency's privacy policy says, and share it with the person and the people they choose.

Checklist

- ☐ I told the person what we are doing and why, and asked if they wanted to do it now.
- ☐ I asked the person first, in the way they communicate, and wrote their words in quotes.
- ☐ I wrote how they say yes, no, maybe, not now and "I am done."
- ☐ Every choice I offered was one I could really give.
- ☐ I wrote the options offered, what the person chose and what they did.
- ☐ I honored every "no" and did not coax.
- ☐ I asked people who know the person, and wrote where they differed.
- ☐ The one-page summary is in the front of the binder and the person has their copy.
- ☐ The review date is set and the choices are built into the daily routine.

Where each part comes from

Sources read November 16, 2026 (the eCFR text is current as of November 12; the research papers were read as published abstracts). The record layout, summary page and checklist are Special Learning's; what goes in them is the person's. 42 CFR 441.301 covers HCBS waivers; your state and

agency may differ. A formal preference assessment for a behavior plan is the plan author's work. None of these organizations has reviewed or endorsed this record.

42 CFR 441.301(c)(1) to (4). https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/chapter-IV/subchapter-C/part-441/subpart-G/section-441.301
NADSP Code of Ethics. https://nadsp.org/resources/the-nadsp-code-of-ethics/
Fisher et al. (1992), Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1634435/
DeLeon and Iwata (1996), Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8995834/
Virués-Ortega et al. (2014), American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24679351/

One next step

If your staff support autistic people, the Level 1 ABA Online Training Course for groups introduces autism and behavior-support foundations. $99 per learner · One-time purchase · Each learner has 12 weeks of access from the day they activate their code · Free 7-day trial of the first 2 sessions.

Related free tools: Find your state's DSP training rule · One-page profile template · DSP daily notes template · Behavior support plan implementation checklist · NADSP Code of Ethics onboarding guide · DSP incident report template · DSP training and HR toolkit