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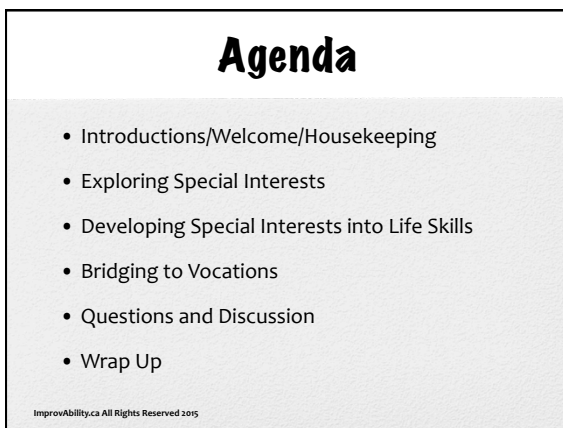
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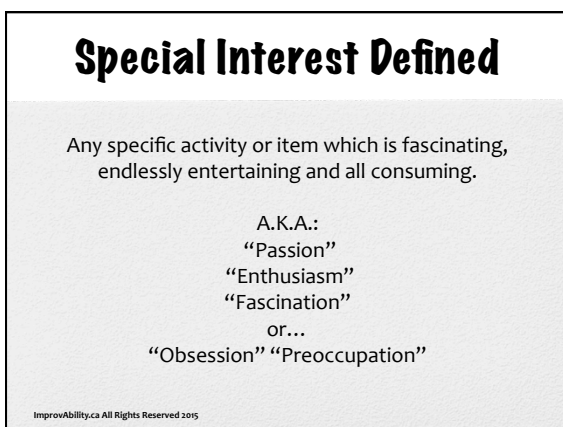
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## ASD and Special Interests

- Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurological condition affecting social/communications, emotional and cognitive functioning. It is a broad continuum going from mildly affected to intensely impaired
- Many children with an ASD have a special interest. Some may have several. Some may not have any discernable special interest
- The intensity and variation of **special interests** and their impact on the lives of individuals can range from mild to extreme.

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## Special Interest or Obsession?

When perceived as a negative (ie An obsession which interferes with life) we may attempt to distract our children with alternate activities or we may restrict their access ( to the activity) in the hopes that the “obsession” will subside or be replaced ....

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## Brain Wave

In groups of two or three, discuss special interests your client or loved one has.



On a Sticky Note, write the special interest(s). Post it on the wall.

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### Some Special Interests

• Trains	• Computer Games	• Tae Kwon Do
• Trucks	• Busses	• Hockey
• Subways	• Telephones	• History
• Cars	• Maps	• Picnics
• Airplanes	• Movies	• Elevators
• Sitcoms	• Lego	• Swimming
• Video Games	• Motorcycles	• Weight Training
• Stories/Books	• Speaker systems	• Animals
• Music	• Electronics	• Dogs
• Super Mario		• Dinosaurs... and ....

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### ...And Special Special Interests

• Car Washes	• Winnie the Pooh
• Hubcaps	• Time
• Bus Schedules	• The # 24
• Ladies Ankles	• Manhole covers
• Quartz Space Heaters	• Flushing Toilets
• Oreck Vacuum Cleaners	• NY License Plates

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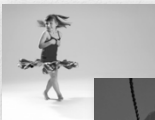
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### Special Interests Have A Purpose


**Sensory**




Alerting



Calming



Focusing



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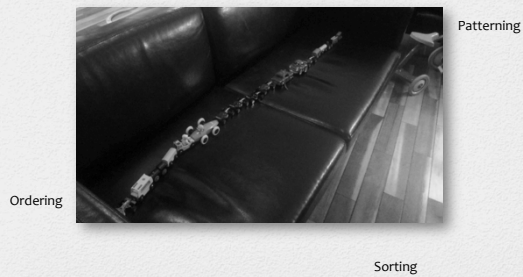
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## Cognitive



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## Social



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## Or?



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## Reality Check

Is this special interest ...  
 ... safe/healthy?  
 ... socially "expected" (appropriate)? If not,  
 does it create social difficulties with peers or  
 others?  
 ... self-sustaining?  
 ... a possible bridge to other life skills or  
 social opportunities?  
 ... legal?

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## Using Special Interests to Build Life Skills

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## Life Skill

- noun: **life skill**; plural noun: **life skills**
- a skill that is necessary or desirable for **full participation** in everyday life. I.e. "sharing with a sibling can help children learn important life skills"

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## Special Interests can Help:

### To Build and Share Classroom Expertise

"Imagine the possibilities for changing student perspectives if students were invited not only to share their fascinations but also to serve as *classroom experts and teachers in those areas*"

Paula Kluth, "Just Give Him The Whale" p. 37

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## Special Interests can Help:

### To Expand Communication Skills



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## Special Interests can Help:

### To Create Social Connections



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## Brain Break!

In groups of 2 or 3, discuss a life skill that your individual needs to learn. Consider ways that you might use their special interest to build that skill.



Place it by the special interest Sticky Note you put up.

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## Build on Strengths

"Students with various labels such as autism, dyslexia, learning problems or ADHD tend to have uneven skills. Development of the area of strength must never be sacrificed by concentrating all teaching resources towards the area of deficit."

Temple Grandin

"Building up a weakness just makes you less disabled. Building a strength can take you to the top of the world."

John Elder Robison

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## List of Asperger Strengths

— from Rudy Simone's site

1. **Focus and diligence** – The Asperger ability to focus on tasks for a long period of time without needing supervision or incentive is legendary.
2. **Internal motivation** – as opposed to being motivated by praise, money, bills or acceptance. This ensures a job done with conscience, with personal pride.
3. **Independent, unique thinking** – people with AS tend to spend a lot of time alone and will likely have developed their own unique thoughts as opposed to a 'herd' mentality.
4. **Higher fluid intelligence** – scientists in Japan have recently discovered that AS children have a higher fluid intelligence than non-autistic children. Fluid intelligence is "the ability to find meaning in confusion and solve new problems. It is the ability to draw inferences and understand the relationships of various concepts, independent of acquired knowledge." (Wikipedia 2009) Experts say that those with AS have a higher than average general IQ as well.
5. **Visual, three-dimensional thinking** – some with AS are very visual in their thought processes, which lends itself to countless useful and creative applications.
6. **Attention to detail** – sometimes with painstaking perfection.
7. **Honesty** – the value of being able to say "the emperor isn't wearing any clothes."
8. **Logic over emotion** – although people with AS are very emotional at times, we spend so much time 'computing' in our minds that we get quite good at it. We can be very logical in our thought processes.

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## Using Special Interests to Build a Career

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**...from "How To Find Work That Works For People  
with Asperger's Syndrome"**

"Special Interests, fixations and fascinations ...  
need to be recognized for their potential and  
encouraged and broadened. They may lead  
indirectly or even directly to a career *if they are  
used to motivate the candidate to expand his  
knowledge base and to grow*"(italics mine.)

**- Gail Hawkins.**

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## The "Go-To" Guy

"When you're a kid, people make fun of your  
special interest. When you're a grown up,  
though, your special interest makes you the  
expert – the go-to guy – for whatever it is you  
really love."

**-John Elder Robison "Be Different" p.227**

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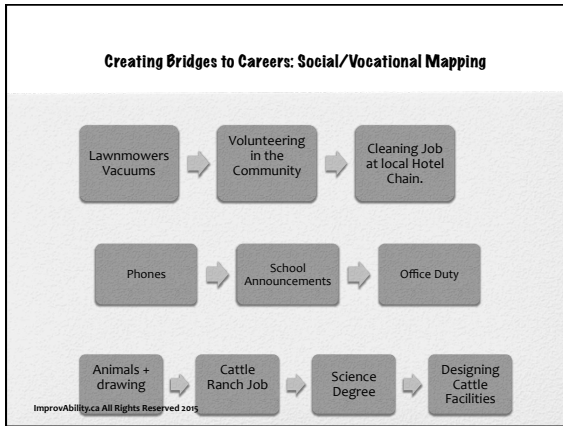
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**Brain Break!**

In groups of two or three, discuss what vocational pathways might be options for your individual, using the special interest and skills notes to build on.

Add this/these to another Sticky and place them beside the first two notes already posted.

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**Some Career Possibilities**

Chef	Tour guide
Machinist	Cleaner
Welder	Luggage handler
Landscaper	Security Officer
Travel Agent	Financial Representative (Bank)
Office support	Teacher
Subway driver	Musician
Flight attendant	Composer
Software developer	Courier
Librarian	Computer technician

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### CASDA National Needs Assessment Survey (2014)



Of those surveyed:

**For Those Adults With ASD:**  
60% Employment or Day programs  
 49% - Social Programs  
 48% Life Skills training

**For Self Advocates:**  
 45% Mental Health Treatment  
41% Employment Services  
 40% Social Skills training

(From the Executive Summary of the National Needs Assessment Survey)

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### Everyone Needs:



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“I have been very fortunate to find a career I can thrive in, but it didn’t happen by chance. Many teachers and mentors supported me and helped me find success.”

Temple Grandin (forward to “Asperger’s On the Job” by Rudy Simone)



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### Final Thought

“ I read. I am learning to drive. I am writing a novel (please buy it when it's out - It's called “The Dark Side of the Moose”), I work out. I have a job. And I have autism.”  
 - Tony, young adult with ASD  
 April 1, 2015 Autism On The Hill  
 Ottawa

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### Thank You!

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 416-709-7760  
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