

**[PositivelyAutism.com](http://PositivelyAutism.com) Newsletter**  
**February 2013**  
**Topic: Teaching with Special Interests**



Check out Positively Autism's next online class:

**Reducing Problem Behaviors**

Learn highly effective strategies for reducing problem behaviors, improving communication, and increasing positive behavior in your home or classroom.

Classes can be accessed from any computer with an internet connection at any time of day convenient for you.

**Register Early and Save! Click for More Info**

*Last Day For Early Registration Is February 28<sup>th</sup>!*

**February Newsletter Topic: More Teaching with Special Interest Areas!**

Children and adults with autism may have strong interests in a certain area, such as computers, weather, trains, etc. These interests can often be used as powerful teaching tools to increase academic skills, improve behaviors, and facilitate social skills.

In this month's newsletter, we will continue this topic and provide information and resources about how to use special interests to make learning more fun, motivating, and effective.

**Special Interests: An Evidence-Based Practice?**

As professionals or parents teaching children with autism, it is critical that the strategies we use are supported by research. This is important so that we don't waste money or the child's time on interventions that may not be effective. If an intervention method has sufficient research support, it is called an evidence-based practice (EBP).

The [National Standards Report](#) is a report published in 2009 that lists how much research support different autism intervention methods have. This report lists "incorporating...special interests...or ritualistic/obsessional activities into tasks" as an "Established" intervention\*. This means that there is research to support the strategy.

I hope knowing that there is research support to incorporating student interests into learning activities will encourage more teachers to use this valuable strategy with confidence.

This month, Positively Autism will provide you with information and tools to use student interests to teach in the classroom and home.

*\*As part of the "Antecedent Package" - NAC Report, page 44.*

## Promote a Social/Leisure Skill with Special Interests

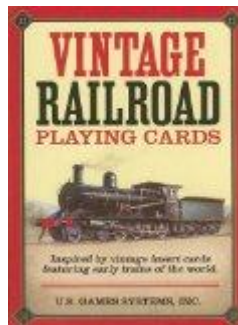
A fun way to increase interest in playing card games with family or friends is by using a deck of cards that features pictures of favorite characters. I've used a deck of cards featuring the characters from *Angry Birds: Star Wars* to play a variety of "classic" card games, such as War or Slapjack. We also worked on adding and subtracting using the cards as manipulatives to demonstrate the math problems. There are many ways that a set of cards could be used for teaching activities.



[Angry Birds Star Wars Playing Cards - Bundle of 4 Decks in 4 Colorful Tins](#)



[Star Wars Heros & Villains Illustrated Double Deck Playing Cards in Tin](#)



[Vintage Railroad Playing Cards](#)



[Harry Potter Playing Cards](#)

## **From Tarantulas to Toilet Brushes: Understanding the Special Interest Areas of Children and Youth With Asperger Syndrome**

Author: Mary Ann Winter-Messiers

Journal: Remedial and Special Education

Issue: Volume 28, Number 3, May/June 2007

Why Read This Article? "Strong positive relationships were found between special interests and improvements in students' social, communication, emotional, sensory, and fine motor skills. Based on these findings, the researcher created a strength-based model of AS and special interests that emphasizes the critical need for teachers to understand and value the special interests of these students and the impact on their families."

Link: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.121.1178&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

## **Train-Theme App to Teach Emotion Recognition**

We featured this app before, but I'm also putting it in this issue. It might be both fun and educational for a student with autism who loves trains!

"With Training Faces, Therese Wantuch said she wanted to create a learning tool that was fun and functional for children with autism. Focused on a passenger train traveling to destinations around the world, the game requires players to match a specified emotion with the correct picture of the passenger's facial expression. Each session includes four rounds, and each round has a time limit. At the completion of each session, the player will get to see the train complete the route on the map."

Read About it Here:

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20121209/BIZ/312090105/A-mom-her-app-Technology-affecting-autism>

Find the App at Amazon.com [here](#).

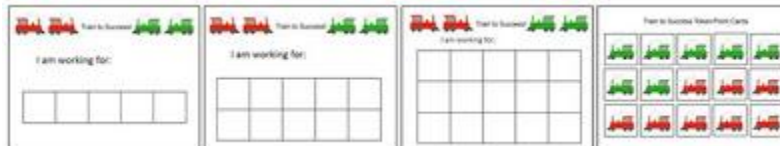
## **Make a Token Economy More Fun with Special Interests**

A token economy is frequently used to reinforce positive behaviors and academic responses in students with autism. An example is shown in this video: <http://youtu.be/yblr6NCfA2U>

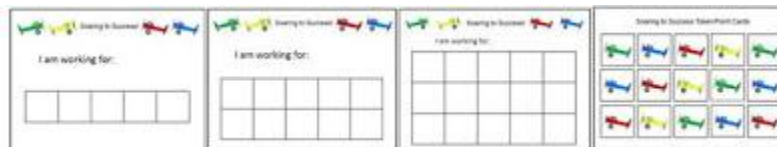
A token economy can be more fun and motivating if special interests are incorporated into the token economy. Pictures of a student's favorite characters, themes, or toys can be used as "tokens." Some examples are below.



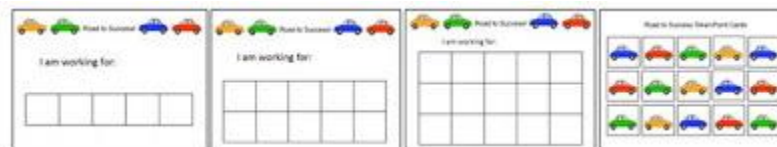
Treasure Chest Token Economy



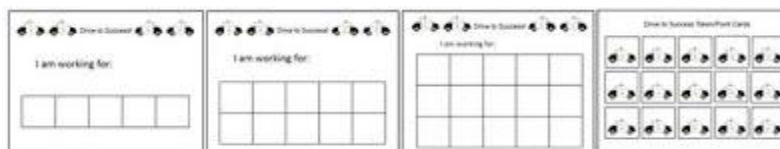
Train Token Economy



Airplane Token Economy



Car Token Economy



Police Car Token Economy

## Encourage Game Play with Special Interests

A fun way to motivate your child or students to try playing a new board game with friends or siblings is to allow them to use an object representing their special interest as a game piece. For the game in the picture, the child used a figure of "Darth Vader" to play a [Mega Blocks game](#).



## News

### February Positive Autism News

Students with Autism Gravitate Toward STEM Majors

February 1, 2013

<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/budding-scientist/2013/02/01/students-with-autism-gravitate-toward-stem-majors/>

'I Am Me' Exhibit Spotlights Talents of Artists Diagnosed with Autism

February 3, 2013

<http://www.tallahassee.com/article/20130203/LIVING04/302030025/-am-me-exhibit-spotlights-talents-artists-diagnosed-autism>

17 Things 'The Princess Bride' Taught Me About Autism Parenting

February 11, 2013

<http://www.snagglebox.com/2013/02/17-things-princess-bride-taught-me.html>

### New Free Downloads

#### St. Patrick's Day Activities



Check out our St. Patrick's Day page for fun activities including

- a vocabulary book,
- a things that are green activity,
- a story about wearing green, and
- a St. Patrick's Day adventure story featuring Travis the Train!
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Find all of the activities here: <http://www.positivelyautism.com/free/stpatricksday.html>

## Spring Activities (Including a Spring Break Social Narrative)



Check out Positively Autism's Spring Resource Page.  
[http://www.positivelyautism.com/free/unit\\_spring.html](http://www.positivelyautism.com/free/unit_spring.html)

It includes:

- Spring Vocabulary
- "Travis the Train Visits a Farm in Spring" Story
- "Travis the Train Visits the City in the Spring" (Vocabulary Story)
- Books and Songs
- "What to Expect on Spring Break" Story

## Easter Social Stories and Activities



Visit [Positively Autism's Easter Resources page](http://www.PositivelyAutism.com) for:

- "Travis the Train Goes on an Easter Egg Hunt" Story
- "Going to Church on Easter" Social Skill Story
- "Going to Church on Easter" Social Skill Article (for older/more verbal students)
- "Decorating Easter Eggs" Social Skill Story
- "Going on an Easter Egg Hunt" Social Skill Story

Visit <http://www.PositivelyAutism.com/> for more great articles and teaching materials!