Interest Explorer

Hobbies and activities to try, starting from what your child already loves.

Made by a Registered Behavior Technician who works with autistic kids and their parents every day.
thesupportshelf.org/interests

How to use this

The easiest hobby to find is the next small step from something your child already loves. This sheet helps you notice what that is, and try ideas one at a time.

1 **Notice what they choose on their own.**
Free time tells you a lot. Write it down below.

2 **Find the kind of experience.**
Is it the movement, the quiet, the sorting, the sound, the building? Circle those groups on the next pages.

3 **Try one idea, small and short.**
Five minutes at home before signing up for a class.

4 **Tick a box after each try.**
"Not for us" is useful information, not a failure.

5 **Share what they liked**
with a teacher, sitter or your child's team.

> **Every child is different.** There is no list of hobbies that suits all autistic kids. These are ideas to try, not recommendations for any one child.

WHAT MY CHILD CHOOSES WHEN NOBODY IS CHOOSING FOR THEM

Lines up cars by color. Watches the washing machine. Asks for the shark book.

Prefer it on screen? The interactive version at thesupportshelf.org/interests sorts these ideas for you and remembers what you've tried.

Ideas to try

Circle the groups that sound like your child, then try one idea at a time. Tick a box after each try.

CALM AND QUIET · settles into slow, focused things

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Jigsaw and shape puzzles Start with fewer, bigger pieces and sort edges first.	☐	☐	☐
Coloring and sticker books Pick a book about a favorite topic.	☐	☐	☐
Audiobooks and story podcasts Free through the public library's app.	☐	☐	☐
Kinetic sand or play dough A tray with edges keeps the mess in one place.	☐	☐	☐
Simple origami and paper folding Follow a video you can pause after each fold.	☐	☐	☐

MOVING AND CLIMBING · jumps, spins, runs, climbs

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Swimming and water play Go at opening time when pools are quietest.	☐	☐	☐
Trampoline time Look for sensory-friendly hours at trampoline parks.	☐	☐	☐
Bike, scooter or balance bike rides Ride the same loop until it feels familiar.	☐	☐	☐
Climbing at a quiet playground Weekday mornings are usually calmest.	☐	☐	☐
Dancing at home Make a short playlist of songs they already love.	☐	☐	☐

Ideas to try, continued

BUILDING AND MAKING · stacks, connects, creates

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Blocks and building sets Keep pieces sorted by color or size in clear bins.	☐	☐	☐
Marble runs and ramps Cardboard tubes and tape work as well as a kit.	☐	☐	☐
Cardboard box builds Save delivery boxes and keep a tape-and-markers bin.	☐	☐	☐
Simple cooking and baking Use a picture recipe and pre-measure the ingredients.	☐	☐	☐

SORTING AND COLLECTING · lines up, groups, collects

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Collecting rocks, shells or leaves An egg carton makes a ready-made sorting box.	☐	☐	☐
Trading cards or sticker collections A binder with sleeves keeps the collection in order.	☐	☐	☐
Sorting buttons, beads or blocks A muffin tin makes a good sorting tray.	☐	☐	☐

MUSIC AND SOUND · songs on repeat, rhythm, sounds

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Keyboard or piano apps Headphones keep it quiet for everyone.	☐	☐	☐
Drumming on buckets or pots Take turns copying a short beat.	☐	☐	☐
Making playlists Let them name each playlist.	☐	☐	☐

Ideas to try, continued

WATER AND TEXTURES · splashing, sand, squishy things

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Water table or sink play Cups, funnels and a towel underneath are enough.	☐	☐	☐
Slime, foam and texture bins Offer a spoon or gloves for kids who don't like messy hands.	☐	☐	☐

NATURE AND ANIMALS · bugs, dogs, plants, outside

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Gardening in a pot Fast growers like beans or sunflowers show change quickly.	☐	☐	☐
Bird or bug watching A simple picture guide to tick off what they spot.	☐	☐	☐
Visiting animals at quiet times Go at opening time and ask about sensory bags.	☐	☐	☐

DRAWING AND COLOR · markers, paint, patterns

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Drawing a favorite topic Keep a sketchbook just for that one topic.	☐	☐	☐
Painting and color mixing Paint in the bath or on a big sheet of paper outside.	☐	☐	☐
Pattern blocks and mosaics Start by copying a picture card, then free build.	☐	☐	☐

Ideas to try, continued

FACTS AND READING · knows everything about one topic

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Books about one favorite topic Ask a librarian for everything on that topic.	☐	☐	☐
Maps, flags and globes Print a map of your own neighborhood to start.	☐	☐	☐
Making a book about their interest One page a day, stapled together at the end.	☐	☐	☐
Science or children's museum visits Look for sensory-friendly mornings, and plan to leave early if needed.	☐	☐	☐

HOW THINGS WORK · vehicles, gears, taking things apart

IDEA	TRIED	LIKED	NOT FOR US
Taking apart old electronics Unplugged, batteries out, with an adult and a small screwdriver.	☐	☐	☐
Simple science kits Do one experiment per session, not the whole kit.	☐	☐	☐
Watching trains, planes or construction Find a spot with a view and bring headphones for the loud moments.	☐	☐	☐
Beginner coding games Block-based apps made for kids are a gentle start.	☐	☐	☐

What we noticed

After a few tries, look back. Patterns show up quickly once they're written down.

WHAT WE TRIED	HOW LONG	WHAT HELPED, OR WHAT GOT IN THE WAY
Marble run	*25 min*	*Loved watching the marbles. Upset when it fell; tape helped.*

THE KIND OF EXPERIENCE THAT KEEPS COMING UP

Building things that move.

ONE IDEA TO TRY NEXT

Science museum, Saturday at opening.

If trying new things is usually distressing, or one interest crowds out sleep or eating, mention it to your child's pediatrician or team. They know your child.

What now

One interest, one idea, one short try this week.

THIS WEEK

- [ ] Write down what your child chooses on their own, on page 1.
- [ ] Circle the groups that fit, then pick one idea.
- [ ] Try it for five minutes. Tick a box.
- [ ] Try one more idea before the week ends.

WANT TO TRY SOMETHING OUT OF THE HOUSE?

Sensory-friendly outings in Houston at thesupportshelf.org/events lists quieter hours and adapted events, each checked by hand.

Visual Schedules (Everyday Life, free) helps with the trip: a First / Then card for "first car, then museum."

The Support Shelf is made by a Registered Behavior Technician. These pages offer ideas to try; they are not treatment advice.