

Using Visual Supports



What are Visual Supports

Visual supports are a strategy that can help individuals better understand the information being presented to them. Visual supports can be helpful by clarifying expectations and by providing increased structure, both of which can be helpful for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Visual supports stay in the environment far longer than verbal communication, allowing individuals to take as long as necessary to process the information and reducing confusion and anxiety.

Why Should We Use Visual Supports?

Visual supports can be especially useful for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder because they often have visual processing that is significantly stronger than their verbal processing skills. Visual supports capitalize on this strength.

Visual supports allow individuals to:

- Process information
- Organize information
- Remember information
- Respond to information

Visual supports allow individuals to be more active in the communication process and to better understand their environment.

When they better understand their environment, individuals show:

- Decreased stress
- Decreased negative behaviors
- Increased appropriate behaviors

When Should We Use Visual Supports?

Visual supports can be used in nearly all situations.

They are especially effective for:

- Offering choices
- Organizing daily schedules
- Clarifying rules and expectations
- Supporting transitions between activities
- Explaining changes in routines

Visual supports can include:

- Words
- Drawings/Pictures
- Photographs

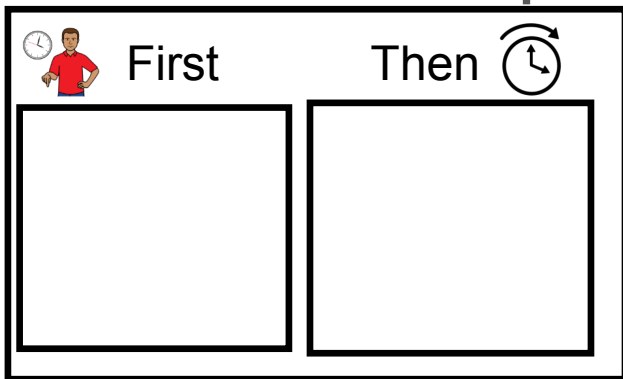
Some common visual supports include:

- Checklists
- Steps to complete homework assignments
- Calendars/Assignment notebooks
- Labels on drawers/bins
- Schedules
- Pictures of rules

How to Start Using Visual Supports

1. First, identify the situation where supports will be helpful
Example: The student struggles with his morning transition into homeroom
2. Determine the type of visual support necessary (e.g., words, pictures, photographs, objects)
Example: He is a strong reader, so word-based supports would be most appropriate
3. Prepare for the visual supports (e.g., understand the expectations being supported, gather pictures)
Example: Talk with his teachers and determine all necessary steps
4. Make the visual support durable to reduce the need to recreate it
Example: Create a laminated checklist and attach a dry erase marker
5. Determine where to keep the support and when to access it
Example: The student needs it first thing in the morning, so it will be hung in his locker
6. Teach the individual how to use the visual support and practice its use
Example: Initially have staff prompt use of the checklist but then fade prompts over time

Sample Visual Supports



<input type="checkbox"/> Hang up backpack
<input type="checkbox"/> Hang up coat
<input type="checkbox"/> Empty backpack
<input type="checkbox"/> Take green binder and assignment notebook
<input type="checkbox"/> Go to homeroom

How Can I Learn More?

Books

- Earles-Vollrath, T.L., Cook, K.T., & Ganz, J.B. (2006). *How To Develop and Implement Visual Supports*. Pro-ed: Austin, TX.
- Hodgdon, L. (2011). *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication (Revised & Updated Edition): Practical Supports for Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Troy, Michigan: QuirkRoberts
- McClannahan, L.E., & Krantz, P.J. (2010). *Activity Schedules for Children With Autism, Second Edition: Teaching Independent Behavior (Topics in Autism)*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.
- Savner, J.L. & Myles, B.S. (2000). *Making Visual Supports Work in the Home and Community: Strategies for Individuals with Autism and Asperger Syndrome*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Websites

- www.usevisualstrategies.com
- www.trainland.tripod.com
- www.do2learn.com
- www.mayer-johnson.com
- www.slatersoftware.com



Easterseals • eastersealschicago.org
1939 W. 13th Street • Chicago, IL • 60608
P 312.432.1751