

# 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

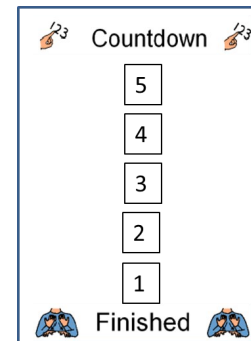
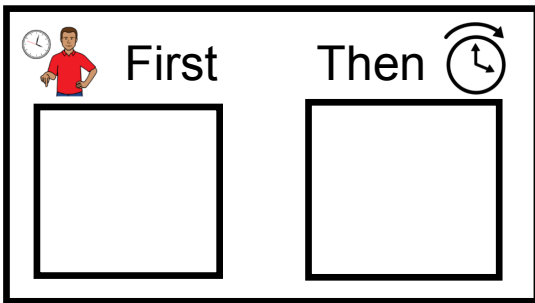
Some common visual supports include:

- Labels on drawers/bins
- Calendars
- Schedules
- Pictures of rules

# How to Start Using Visual Supports

1. First, identify the situation where supports will be helpful  
**Example:** At recess time, the individual struggles to make choices so a choice board would be helpful
2. Determine the type of visual support necessary (e.g., words, pictures, photographs, objects)  
**Example:** She needs images to look very similar to real life, so photographs would be best
3. Gather the necessary materials (e.g., objects, photographs, pictures)  
**Example:** Take photographs of all the recess options
4. Make the visual support durable to reduce the need to recreate it  
**Example:** Laminate the images, attach Velcro, make multiple copies
5. Determine where to keep the support and when to access it  
**Example:** The choice board will be kept near the recess door and taken out to recess at recess time
6. Teach the individual how to use the visual support and practice its use  
**Example:** Begin with just 2 choices and slowly increase choices until she can select from a range

## Sample Visual Supports



## 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](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com)
- [www.trainland.tripod.com](http://www.trainland.tripod.com)
- [www.do2learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com)
- [www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com)
- [www.slatersoftware.com](http://www.slatersoftware.com)



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