

Visual Supports

Definition:

Visual supports are an effective strategy that includes: concrete items, pictures, symbols or printed words and/or a combination of these. These supports may assist children in their ability to maintain attention, understand spoken language, and sequence and organize their environment (Hodgdon, 1995). The type of visual support used should be dependent on the child's abilities and should be monitored closely to ensure its effectiveness. Visual supports are proactive (before a situation occurs) strategies that may increase appropriate behaviours/skills or decrease challenging behaviours.

Rationale:

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are often strong visual learners (Quill, 2000). Visual supports are helpful for children with ASD by providing static messages to assist with organization and difficulty with recall. A child with ASD may prefer a visual mode for learning as they may have difficulties in processing auditory information. Your child may not attend to the entire message; instead they may focus on a part, subsequently misinterpreting the original intent of the message. With a visual display, your child has time to see all the possibilities, has time to process the message, and has time to check the options as often as he or she needs before making a decision (Vicker, 2007).

Why Use Visual Supports?

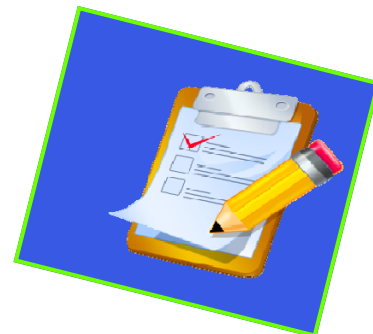
- Help prevent challenging behaviour
- Support receptive and expressive language skills
- Reminder for your child at times of high anxiety
- Increase ability to understand rules/expectations
- Represent routines/activities
- Encourage self-monitoring and regulation skills
- Serve as a cue for a new skill or behaviour
- Assist with transition times

Also Known As:

- Visual Strategies

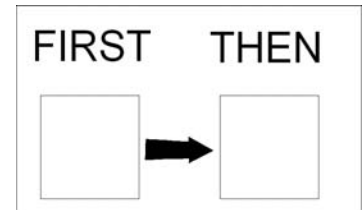
You're already doing it by . . .

- Providing a schedule at home
- Using a clock to indicate what time they have to be ready
- Using a checklist

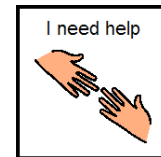


Examples of Visual Supports

A **'first-then' board** is a visual support that includes objects, photos, pictures, line drawings or text and is used to provide information to the child around an expectation. Often, the 'first' section involves a task that the child is expected to complete, and the 'then' section is a preferred item/activity (reinforcer) for successful completion of the indicated task. (Hodgdon, 1995)



A **help card** is a visual support which may be used by your child to communicate the message that they need help with an activity or task. (Hodgdon, 1995)



Schedules provide a child with information around what will be occurring during various times throughout the day. They often convey what is happening, what is not happening, the sequence in which events are happening and when the various events/activities are over (Hodgdon, 1995).

NIGHT TIME SCHEDULE



A **choice board** includes objects, photos, pictures, line drawings or text which can be used by the child to communicate what activity, item or task they would like. A minimum of 2 choices would be presented to the child at one time for a child to make a choice. (Hodgdon, 1995)



The **5 Point Scale** may help children with ASD learn how to identify and manage their own behaviours and emotions. At each level the child identifies what these may look like, feel like and possible solutions to control them. By using a graphic 5 point numerical scale, this may help translate abstract information into a concrete, visible, and measurable format that can be referred to at any time by either the child or parent (Dunn & Curtis, 2003).

Rating	Looks like...	Feels like...	I can try to...
5	Wide-eyed, screaming and running, hitting.	My head is going to explode if I don't get away.	Show an adult that I am at a 5 and need to leave the area to go to my safe zone.
4	Threaten others, swear or push into them.	People are staring at me. I feel angry and upset.	Count to 10. Leave the room for a walk.
3	You can't tell I'm scared. I start to shake my leg and tapping my fingers.	Stomach is in knots.	Doodle in my book. Draw about how I feel. Close my eyes.
2	I still look fine.	My stomach gets a little queasy.	Slow my breathing. Tell someone safe how I feel.
1	Normal- Smiling, talking nicely.	Can't explain.	Enjoy it!!!!

References:

Dunn, K., & Curtis, M. (2003). *The incredible 5-point scale: Assisting students with autism spectrum disorders in understanding social interactions and controlling their emotional responses*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing.

Hodgdon, L. (1995). *Visual strategies for improving communication practical supports for school and home*,
Troy: QuirkRoberts Publishing.

Quill, K. (2000). *Do-Watch-Listen-Say*. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul h. Brookes Publishing Co.

Vicker, B. (1999). *Visual schedules and choice boards: Avoid misinterpretation of their primary function*.

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<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/communication/choicebrd.html>.

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