

Visual Schedules

What are visual schedules?

Schedules are visual supports that provide your 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).

Why might you use visual schedules?

Although many children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have difficulty with change, transitions and the understanding of auditory input; they tend to have strong rote memories and the ability to understand visual information (Quill, 2000). Schedules address these areas of difficulty and capitalize on these strengths through the use of visual representations of activities/events which can be referred to by your child at any given time.

When could you use visual schedules?

Schedules are strategies used before a potentially challenging situation may occur. Visuals schedules are strategies used to clarify expectations and increase your child's understanding around what will be occurring throughout the day. Schedules can be used within the home to represent both family and individual schedules.

How could you use visual schedules?

- Organize the day and establish a routine
- Support independence
- Help with transitions between activities
- Provide structure
- Prepare for change
- Reduce anxiety
- Increase your child's flexibility
- Be useful when redirecting your child

Implementing visual schedules for your child:

Provide your child with a visual cue to transition them to their schedule or bring schedule information to them. Teach your child how to transition to the schedule with a visual cue and/or how to transition to a location with scheduled information by:

- a. standing behind your child when prompting the use of their visual schedule (to ensure your child is looking at the schedule information)
- b. by placing schedule information in your child's hand

- c. using concise and relevant language, identifying the location where your child is going (i.e., “breakfast” instead of “Come on, Steve, we’re going into the kitchen to eat breakfast and the new cereal I bought you. I think you are going to love it!”)
- d. assisting your child in getting to designated activity/location, and prompting your child to place schedule materials in appropriate location (e.g., to use the material if it is a functional object, or to match the material if appropriate)
- e. ensuring that your child remains in scheduled activity/location until next transition cue is given
- f. repeating steps “a” through “e” above until your child is able to complete this sequence independently across activities/locations
- g. fading prompts as quickly as possible.

Questions to consider when implementing a visual schedule:

- What is your child’s visual recognition level (e.g., objects, photos, pictures, line drawings or text)?
- What is the goal of the schedule?
- How are you going to teach the schedule?
- Where is the schedule going to be placed?
- How much information can your child manage on their schedule (e.g., 2 activities, 5 activities, etc.)?
- What are the main events of your child’s day?
- What format will the schedule follow (e.g., horizontal, vertical, etc.)?
- Will the schedule include a finished section?
- Is the strategy at your child’s developmental level?

Before implementing any strategy, remember to:

- 1) Assess – What is the child currently able to do?
- 2) Goal – What is a specific goal for the child to work towards?
- 3) Strategies – How will you teach to reach the goal?
- 4) Monitor – How will you know if the teaching strategies are working?

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