



Using Visual Supports



What are Visual Supports

Visual supports are tools that help individuals better understand language and expectations. They provide increased structure and support for individuals with language difficulties, and are especially useful 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
- Objects

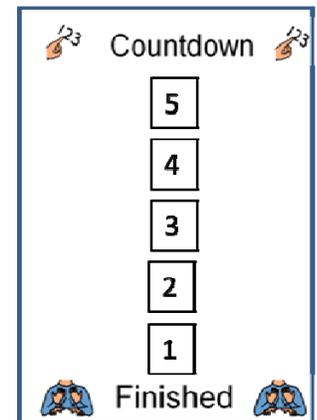
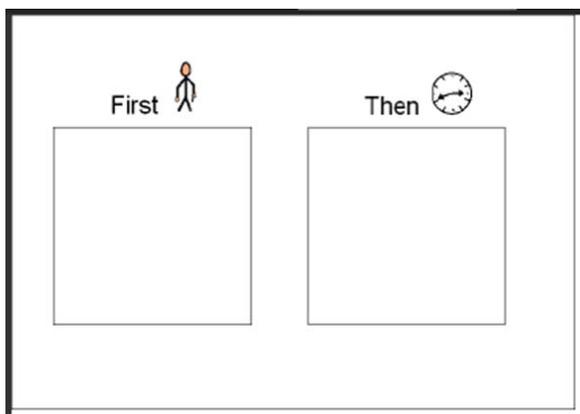
Some common visual supports include:

- 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 snack 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 snack food 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 in the snack bin and placed on the snack table at snack 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. (2000). *Visual Supports for Improving Communication*. QuirkRoberts: Troy, Michigan.
- McClannahan, L.E., & Krantz, P.J. (1999). *Activity Schedules for Children with Autism*. Woodbine House: Bethesda, MD.
- Savner, J.L. & Myles, B.S. (2000). *Making Visual Supports Work in the Home and Community*. Autism Aspergers Publishing Company: Shawnee Mission, KS.

Websites

- www.usevisualstrategies.com: Use Visual Strategies
- www.trainland.tripod.com: Beyond Autism PECS, Pictures/Icon Pages
- www.do2learn.com: Do 2 Learn
- www.mayer-johnson.com: Boardmaker (available for purchase)
- www.slatersoftware.com: Picture It (available for purchase)

For online modules on Visual Supports and how to implement this evidence-based practice see www.autisminternetmodules.org and the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders <http://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/visual-supports> .

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