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March 2021

Volume 9, Issue 7

Autism Agenda



Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

Visual supports for autism: a step by step guide

[Maureen Bennie](#)

October 8, 2017

People on the autism spectrum tend to learn best using visual supports rather than through auditory input. Seeing it, rather than saying it, helps the person retain and process information. [Temple Grandin](#), the most famous woman in the world with autism, describes being a visual thinker in her excellent book [Thinking in Pictures](#).

HOW CAN VISUAL SUPPORTS BE USED?

With visual supports you can:

1. Create daily/weekly schedules with visual blocks of time
2. Show sequential steps in a task such as a bedtime routine or getting dressed
3. Demonstrate units of time
4. Make a "to do" list
5. Aid communication for those who are less or non verbal
6. Offer choices

WHAT EXACTLY IS A VISUAL SUPPORT?

Visuals supports can be pictures, objects, sign language or text. They can come in a variety of forms. Some examples of programs that generate visuals are:

[Boardmaker \(Mayer-Johnson\)](#) – This popular software generates Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) and other graphics. The draws are line drawings and not actual photos. Boardmaker does not work for every child because some children do not understand what the line drawings mean. *Continued on page 2.*



VISUAL SUPPORTS FOR AUTISM CONTINUED....

Communicate: SymWriter (formerly Writing with Symbols) – A different approach to writing, reading and literacy development, this program is a talking word processor that matches symbols to words to help students of all ages and abilities increase comprehension and fluency. Writing activities challenge students with a focus on creating summaries, biographies, letters, persuasive papers, reports and reviews. A great tool for students with limited spelling abilities or those who have trouble accessing a keyboard, SymWriter comes equipped with symbol-supported grids for writing, making independent engagement in assignments and projects possible for all students.

Indiana Resource Center for Autism – Free visuals organized by topic.

PictureSET – a collection of downloadable visual supports that can be used by students for both receptive and expressive communication in the classroom, at home, and in the community. This searchable database allows you to find a wide range of useful visual supports for different curriculum areas, activities, and events. PictureSET resources are created and updated by dedicated professionals working with students in British Columbia.

Visual Suite DVD – This is a new product that has thousands of photos in situations often encountered in everyday life, like chores, money, school supplies, what's different and many more.

CAN I MAKE MY OWN VISUAL SUPPORTS?

Some of these programs tend to be expensive and not everyone can afford them. An alternative to buying a pre-packaged product is to make your own visuals. You can achieve this in a number of ways:

- By taking photos with a digital camera
- Cutting out pictures from print media such as magazines or old calendars
- Dollar stores can be a great place to find inexpensive visuals.

A note of caution when taking photos – be sure to keep the background at a minimum and make the focal point the subject of the photo. If you take photos from too far away, the background tends to get busy looking and can become the focal point for people with autism.

THERE ARE ALSO MANY APPS THAT OFFER VISUAL SUPPORTS AT LOW COSTS

Applications for iPad and iTouch are making visual supports more accessible than ever and at a low cost. The Autism Speaks [website](#) has a great list of available apps and what they are used for. If you're looking for a great book that reviews apps, try [Apps for Autism](#). Another excellent website for visuals is www.do2learn.com. A good article to read about visual supports and how to use them is [Learning Through Seeing and Doing](#) by Shaila Rao and Brenda Gagie.



Continued on page 3.

VISUAL SUPPORTS FOR AUTISM CONTINUED....

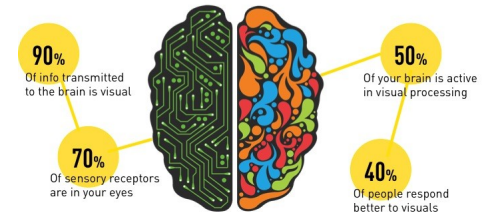
WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO USE VISUAL SUPPORTS

There is a hierarchy to using visual supports. Start with matching an object to object, then object to picture, then picture to picture. You begin with using the actual object matching to the same object. Once that is mastered, then match an object to a picture. This helps the child understand that a picture can be a representation of an object. Finally, you can match a picture to a picture. I see people who do not use this progression and can't understand why the child doesn't understand a picture such as the ones generated by Boardmaker.

Here is the hierarchy for the visual supports themselves:

1. Object
2. Color Photos
3. Black and White Photos
4. Color Drawing
5. Black and White Drawing
6. Written Word

Our brain process visuals 60,000x faster than text



I am a fan of using the written word with all visual supports because no one can predict when understanding/comprehension of the written word will begin. Reading is a gradual process that involves years of skill building so it's important to provide as much exposure to the printed word as possible. Some children read before they can speak, which was the case with my daughter. I discovered this quite by chance when Julia typed a Word document on the computer at age 4 with perfect spelling.

WHEN DO I STOP USING VISUAL SUPPORTS FOR MY CHILD WITH AUTISM?

I am often asked the question, "When do I fade the use of visual supports?" The answer is...you don't. All of us use some sort of visual tool to create schedules and keep ourselves organized. We use iPhones, daytimers, desk calendars, and checklists. Use these tools to create visual schedules for our folks on the spectrum because they create predictability which lessens anxiety.

Do you stop using your daytimer, calendar or iPhone? Do you shop without a list? The answer is no, so don't stop using visuals with people on the spectrum. You can change what you use as the child ages because it may no longer be appropriate. A teenager using a Velcro strip visual schedule taped to his desk may make him stand out from his peers, but an iTouch helps him be like everyone else.

One final note – just because a person on the autism spectrum is highly verbal or intelligent doesn't mean they don't need visual supports. I know an adult woman on the spectrum who lives successfully on her own, but keeps checklists all over her apartment on how to do laundry, dishes, and when to take out the garbage.

Visual supports help with learning, retaining information, communication, and expression. To quote my good friend Leslie Broun, "*Auditory information is transient – visual information can be fixed and permanent.*"

<https://autismawarenesscentre.com/visual-supports-best-way-use/>

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VISUAL SUPPORTS

Visual Supports

BY: DAWNA SIGURDSON

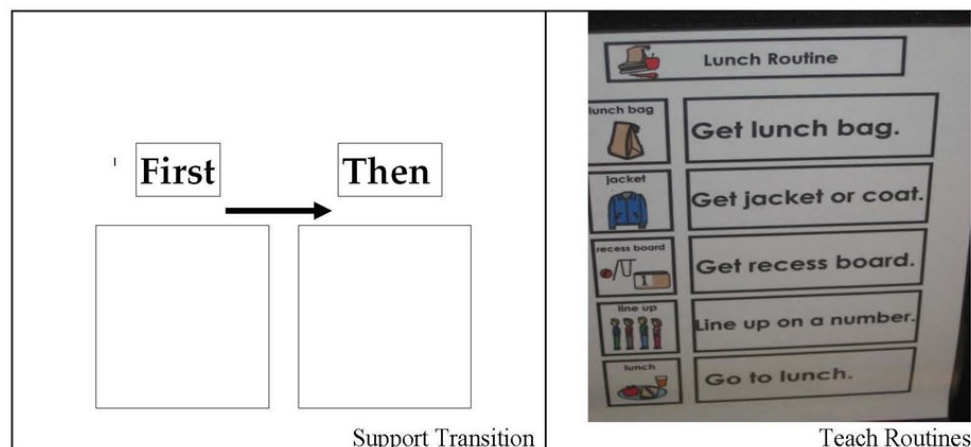
While there is no one strategy that can be used universally with individuals with **autism spectrum disorders (ASD)**, research has shown that many individuals demonstrate strength in visual learning. Visual supports are any tools presented visually to provide assistance to individuals to help them function throughout the day. Visual supports can be implemented with individuals across the life span from preschoolers to adults. In addition, visual supports can be used in the school, home and community settings. Visuals are more permanent and can be more concrete than speech. They are static or “stay put” cues that are readily available to those who need them. Visual supports can replace or complement verbal instruction.

Visual supports have a variety of purposes including:

- Increasing task engagement
- Teaching routine, time concepts and organization
- Providing the ability to make requests or choices
- Supporting transition from one task or activity to another
- Encouraging social interaction
- Providing structure
- Developing play and leisure skills
- Increasing independence in daily living and work skills
- Reducing frustration, anxiety and aggression
- Supporting academic skills
- Providing boundaries

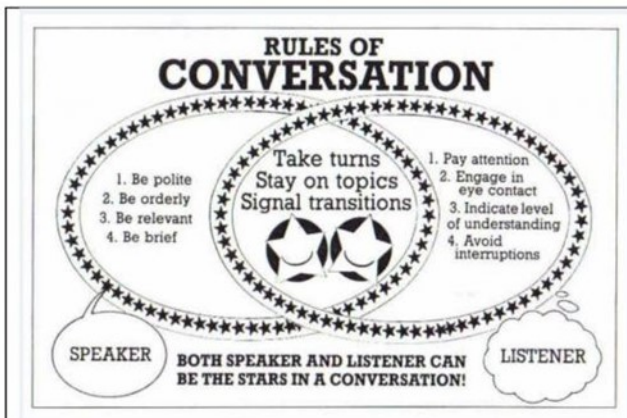


Visual supports examples:

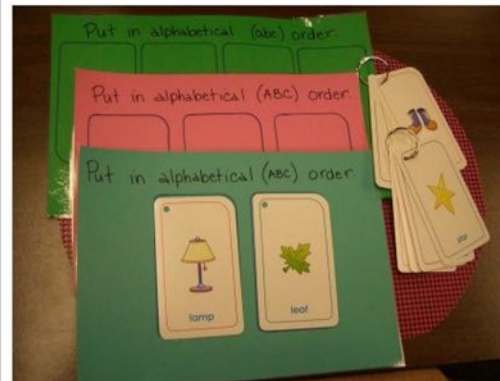


Continued on page 5.

VISUAL SUPPORTS CONTINUED....



Encourage Social Interaction



Support Academic Skills



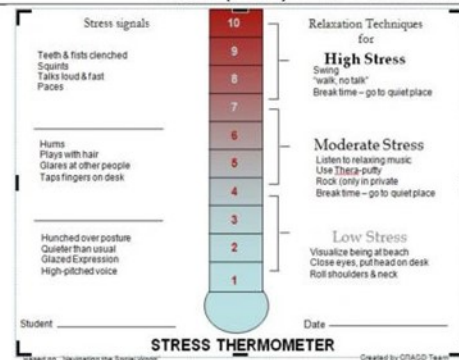
Increase Independence in Daily Living Skills



Develop Play and Leisure Skills



Provide Structure



Reduce Anxiety, Frustration, or Aggression

<https://www.unl.edu/asdnetwork/visual-supports>

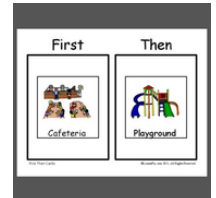
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UF: VISUAL SUPPORTS

UF Center for Autism and Related Disabilities: Visual Supports

Many children with disabilities have strong visual skills, and visual supports can help take advantage of those strengths. Visual communication tools such as objects, photographs, picture symbols, daily schedules and choice boards can provide the support necessary to greatly improve a child's understanding and ability to communicate, helping children be more active, independent and successful participants in their lives. Use of these supports can also help reduce anxiety.

YouTube Video: https://youtu.be/Xh_ooF8PDhM



TYPES OF VISUAL SUPPORTS (CLICK ON HYPERLINK FOR ARTICLES)

SCHEDULES/ MINI SCHEDULES: [HTTP://CARD.UFL.EDU/RESOURCES/VISUAL-SUPPORTS/SCHEDULES/](http://card.ufl.edu/resources/visual-supports/schedules/)

CALENDARS: [HTTP://CARD.UFL.EDU/RESOURCES/VISUAL-SUPPORTS/CALENDARS/](http://card.ufl.edu/resources/visual-supports/calendars/)

CHOICE BOARDS: [HTTP://CARD.UFL.EDU/RESOURCES/VISUAL-SUPPORTS/CHOICEBOARDS/](http://card.ufl.edu/resources/visual-supports/choiceboards/)

SAYING NO: [HTTP://CARD.UFL.EDU/RESOURCES/VISUAL-SUPPORTS/NO/](http://card.ufl.edu/resources/visual-supports/no/)

PEOPLE LOCATORS: [HTTP://CARD.UFL.EDU/RESOURCES/VISUAL-SUPPORTS/PEOPLE/](http://card.ufl.edu/resources/visual-supports/people/)

HELPING YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND AND COMMUNICATE

Communication is a common problem in children who have autism and related disabilities. They often have difficulty understanding even the simplest spoken communication from others. Because of this they have problems knowing what is or isn't happening during their day and why changes occur in their routine. They may have difficulty switching from one activity to the next and understanding why they cannot do something they want to do at a particular time. For a child with disabilities even the simplest directions can come and go too quickly for them to process and understand. A visual support can really help them understand the message.

Visual supports such as those described by Hodgdon (1995, 1997), Quill (1995), Dalrymple (1995) and Roberson, Gravel, Valcante and Maurer (1992) are helping children who do not have conventional communication systems to become more able communication partners. The use of pictures to support our communication with persons who have impairments has been common for some time. Over 20 years ago, Robinson-Wilson (1977) demonstrated that sequenced pictures could help persons with disabilities to follow picture recipes based on previously published cookbooks.

Although the use of visual media has been shown to be effective for communicating with persons who have disabilities for some time, their use with persons who have autism has become very popular recently. This web site will help you to become more familiar with the uses and benefits of visual supports. For additional information, the works mentioned above are referenced at the end of this document.

Many children with disabilities have strong visual skills, and these strengths can be capitalized on with visual supports. Visual communication tools such as objects, photographs, picture symbols, daily schedules and choice boards can provide the support necessary to greatly improve a child's understanding and ability to communicate, helping children be more active, independent and successful participants in their lives.

Read about social stories, another useful form of visual supports.

<http://card.ufl.edu/resources/visual-supports/>

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HOW TO MAKE AND USE OBJECT SCHEDULES

How to Make and Use Object Schedules

Communication, Visual Supports / By Christine Reeve

Many of us work with students who may benefit from using object schedules or objects for communication. However, making that decision and figuring out how to best use them is not always a simple matter. There is not nearly as much information out there about how to make object schedules or even decide what objects to use. So today I want to give you some examples. I will also talk about how I make the decision to try object schedules.



Types of Object Schedules

We tend to think of object schedules as being the last stop on the schedule train. However, believe it or not, there are still different levels of object schedules that can be used. Essentially there are 3 types of object schedules and which you choose would depend on your student.

1. REPRESENTATIVE OBJECT SCHEDULES:

Some students can match objects to objects and are beginning to understand that objects are representational of things they might see in a picture. For these students we might use miniature objects and pair them with pictures for their schedule (e.g., mini backpack, mini bus for dismissal). These might also be students who just need something more 3-dimensional to hold on to, but they are starting to have more understanding of representative thought.

Continued on page 8.

HOW TO MAKE AND USE OBJECT SCHEDULES CONTINUED...

[As I talked about in an earlier post](#)

How to Choose OBJECT Schedules for students with autism	
Questions to Ask	If yes, then
Can the student match picture to picture?	The student can probably use a picture schedule. If that's not successful, you might try a photo schedule or a picture schedule with small objects.
Can the student match objects to pictures?	Then he is probably starting to understand that objects and pictures represent things. You might try a combination picture -object schedule
Can the student match objects to objects?	If so, then he could use a representative object schedule using miniature objects of activities (e.g., a miniature school bus means go home). Just make sure you include the objects on your check-in boards.
Can the student NOT match objects to objects?	Then you want to use either a tactile object schedule or a real-life item schedule. Continue to use check-in boards but make sure the objects are meaningful and useful for the student.
Does the student have visual impairments and does not know Braille or is not	Then you probably will need to use a tactile, real-life item schedule, making sure that the item is something he/she will touch in the activity. Or you could use something that pairs the object with voice output so it gives a verbal direction.

AUTISM CLASSROOM
Items & Resources

I tend to default on picture -symbol schedules unless I know the student needs something different. If I don't know enough about the student, I start with pictures because they are easiest. However, if a student isn't making progress on a picture schedule and doesn't seem to be able to match picture to picture, then we start thinking about objects. Here are some elements that you want to think about in making that decision.

Can the student match picture to picture?

If it's yes, then a picture schedule of some type should be successful—as long [as you use check-in boards](#) with identical pictures.

Can the student match object to pictures?

If yes, then a picture schedule will probably still work because the student is starting to make the transfer from concrete understanding to something more symbolic.

Can the student match object to object?

Then miniature objects might be helpful as long as you include them in the check-in boards.

Does the student have visual impairments?

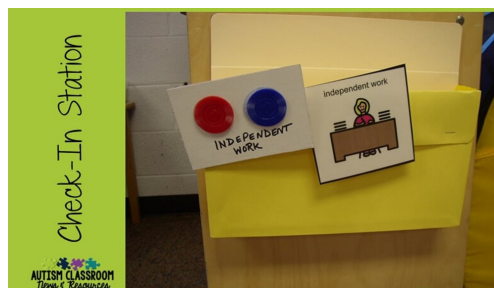
Then a different set of rules apply to some degree. In those cases you are probably going to want to choose a tactile and real-life object schedule so that he or she gets the idea of how the object reflects what is going to happen. I will defer to a VI specialist on this area because there is a lot more information out there than is relevant just to autism.

Continued on page 10.

HOW TO MAKE AND USE OBJECT SCHEDULES CONTINUED...

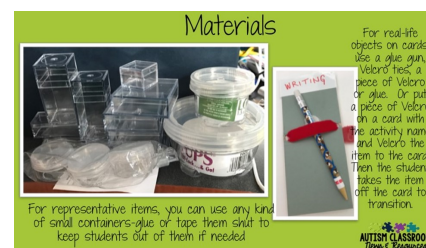
How to Make Object Schedules

To see some ideas about ways to make the schedules, check out the Facebook Live video at the end of the post where I will demonstrate some different types. However, keep the following in mind when you are creating them.



1. If you are using tactile schedules, you need to make sure the students can manipulate the items to feel them, so containers will not work. For those you need to put the items on the schedule or in baskets from left to right. [Here's a great article on how to use them and teach them for a student with VI.](#) [Hanging sweater holders like this can be useful!](#)

2. Make sure you are making decisions about which objects to use in real-life objects by the student's perspective, not the staff. We may use a pencil in writing but if the student is using crayons, DON'T use a pencil as the object for writing.
3. If you are using objects and trying to shift to pictures, you might want to try and put the pictures behind or beside the objects so that students start to make that association.
4. I bought the containers you see the food items and the schedules above at the [Container Store](#). They are for collectible items and I talk more about them in the video below.
5. The communication items above are examples of using a real-life object but setting it up so the students can't get to it. I talk more about this in the video below.
6. I like to use matte board, like that used for framing. I typically cover it with contact paper or shipping tape. Then you can use a glue gun, Velcro or glue to stick the item the background.
7. If you are using real-life items the students need to feel, Velcro the items to a piece of matte board. You can put the activity name on the matte board. Then the student takes the item and leaves the card. But the adult can see the activity so you don't have remember as well what each object.
8. Post a list of which objects go with each activity. Put the list in the order of the schedule so it's easy to reset the schedule for the next day.



So hopefully this has been useful and given you some ideas of things to try. If you have other ways to make object schedules, we would love to hear them! Please share in the comments.

<https://autismclassroomresources.com/make-use-object-schedules/>

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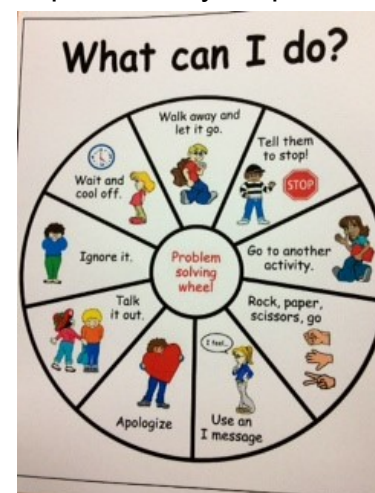
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS

Visual supports make the world more concrete. Here are some additional resources and suggestions:

- AUTISM SPEAKS: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Visual%20Supports%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>
- READING ROCKETS has an article full of pre made visuals ready to use. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/visual-supports-students-asd>
- EARLYWOOD EDUCATIONAL SERVICES offers a library of ready made visuals. <https://www.earlywood.org/Page/546>
- Kari Dunn Buron, The Incredible 5 Point Scale: <https://www.5pointscale.com/scales.html>
- Social Thinking! <https://www.socialthinking.com/Search%20Results#q=visual%20supports>
- LBL ESD Autism Visual Resources: <https://www.lblesd.k12.or.us/cascade-regional-program/autism/teacher-parent-resources/>

Easy visual support suggestions:

- Use post-it notes
- Use a white board w/marker or magnets with letters/pictures
- Draw a stick figure with the words on a piece of paper
- Use the actual object
- Use your phone and pull up a picture of the object, draw or write out the picture on your phone.
- Video modeling
- Graphic Organizers, choice or tic-tac-toe boards
- Graphic Novels
- Watching videos that demonstrate topic being taught for discussion.
- Visual schedules: paper, calendar, phone, electronically on the computer/tablet.
- Use blocks, Legos, Duplos, any object that you can create the visual support needed.
- Signs that we see in our daily lives.



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Visual Supports

What Are They?

Visual supports are pictures or words used to assist with understanding activities or instructions. Verbal instructions can be fleeting and vary quickly. Visuals are helpful as they allow your child to refer to them as often as needed when following their daily routine.

Why Use Visuals?

(Visual Strategy Kit)

- Provides instructions in a more concrete manner
- Breaks down a task into smaller components
- Decreases reliance on verbal prompting

Visual Strategies

Choice Board

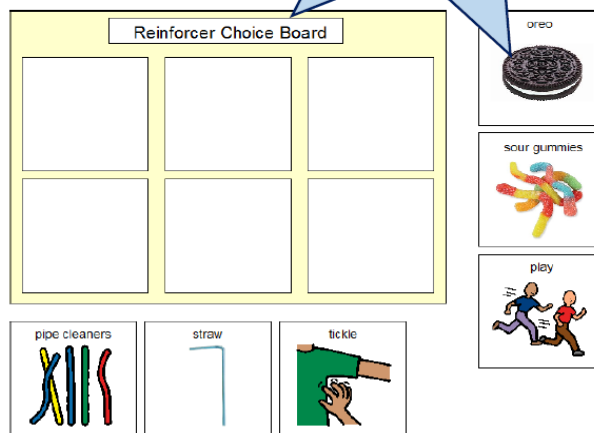
Why Is it Useful?

Choice boards are pictures of a variety of preferred foods, toys, or games that your child is interested in. It allows the child to see what is available in each environment/at any given time.

Children may have a preference, but may have difficulty expressing it. Having a visual showing the varying available options can assist your child in choosing an item/activity. The child express this choice by pointing or by removing the picture and giving it to the parent.

Choice boards are also beneficial because they can change to accommodate what is available in specific environments. School may have some items, while at home there will be different items available.

Free App
ChoiceBoard
Creator



KIDSABILITY VISUAL SUPPORTS CONTINUED...



Visual Schedules

Why Is it Useful?

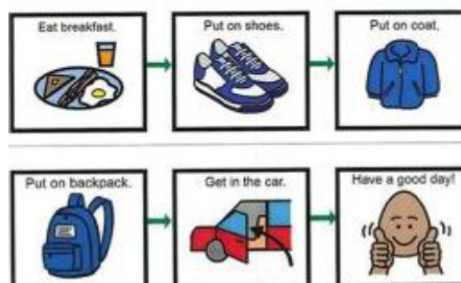
Visual schedules can be used for one child, or multiple children in a group setting. There are visual schedules for: **Dressing**, **Daily Routine**, **School activities**, etc.

Typically they are on a strip of Bristol board with Velcro and the pictures can be removed when the activities are completed. Once completed, the child puts the picture in an "all done" envelope at the bottom of the schedule.

These schedules allow the child to see what is coming up next, and the child can also be involved with completing an activity or transition by putting the pictures in the "all done" envelope.

(i)

Morning Schedule



(iii)



(ii)



Free Android Apps

-PictogramAgenda
-Visual
Schedule



KIDSABILITY VISUAL SUPPORTS CONTINUED...



First-Then Board

Why Is it Useful?

A "First/Then" board can be a useful strategy so your child can see what activity they are completing currently and what activity will occur next (Hume, 2008).

The pictures can be attached using Velcro so they can be changed when necessary.

First-Then boards are useful because they:

- Provide predictability
- Reward completion of an undesired task
- Breaks down a larger schedule

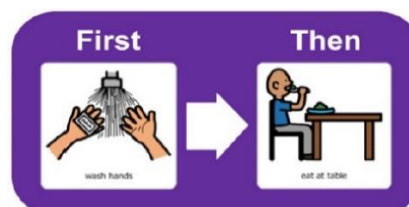
(Visual Strategy Kit, Thames Valley Children's Centre)

First-Then boards are useful for children with **non-compliance** when completing a non-preferred activity or task.

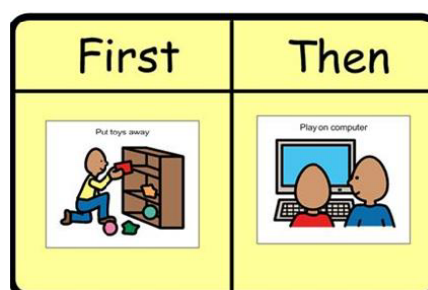
They are also useful for children who have **trouble transitioning** from activity to activity or room-to-room. First-Then boards help the child transition to an activity or location that is not preferred, because the child can visually see that a preferred activity is coming next.

A First/Then board is **portable** and move with the child as he/she transitions (Hume, 2008).

(iv)



(v)



The "**First**" is usually a non-preferred activity.

The "**Then**" is a preferred activity/toy that the child enjoys.

Free Android App
"First-Then"

kidsability.ca



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KIDSABILITY VISUAL SUPPORTS CONTINUED...



Token Board

(Visual Strategy Kit, Thames Valley Children's Centre)

Why Is it Useful?

Token boards are visuals that specify the number of tasks a child must complete in order to gain a reward- an activity or toy that is highly motivating.

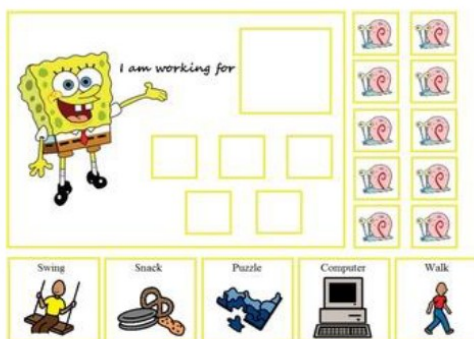
Each time a task is completed, a token is placed on the board. When the child has finished the specified number of tasks, they receive the reward.

The tokens can be stars, checkmarks, or pictures customized to the child's interests (E.g. pictures of Dora)

Token Boards:

- Teach the child to wait longer before they receive a reward
- Increase motivation to complete undesired tasks
- Represents the amount expected from the child visually

(vi)



(vii)



Free Android Apps

- My Token Board
- EasyKidTokens

kidsability.ca



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VISUAL SCHEDULES CONTINUED....



Social Stories/Narratives

(Hodgdon, 1995)

Why Is it Useful?

Social stories are an individualized short stories that are used to model an appropriate social interaction, behavior or skill by describing a relevant social context to the child who is struggling.

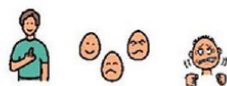
Social Stories:

- Break down the challenging social situation by providing the child with other people's perspectives and an appropriate response to the situation
- The goal of the story is to improve the child's understanding of the social situation, which may lead to a change in behavior and appropriate decision making in future events similar to the story.

(viii)

Sometimes I feel frustrated

or upset.



It's OK to feel frustrated but

I need to stop and calm down.



My work doesn't need to be perfect. I just need to try

my best.



When I am frustrated or upset

I can tell Mrs. Ashley or Mrs. Holbrook and they can



Social Stories Can Help Prepare Children For:

- School field trips
- Grocery shopping
- Getting a hair cut
- Going to the doctor
- Going on an airplane
- Moving

Free Apps

- Social Story Creator
- Library (Touch Autism)

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KIDSABILITY VISUAL SUPPORTS CONTINUED...



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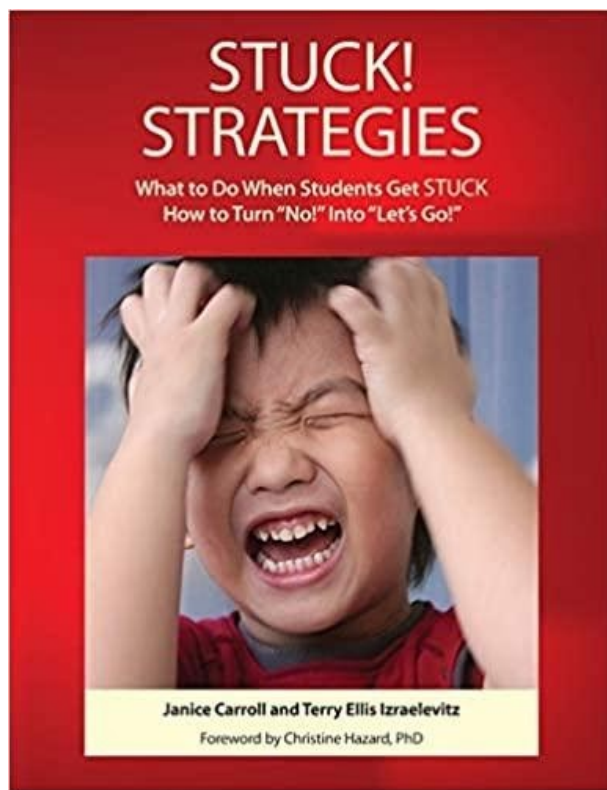
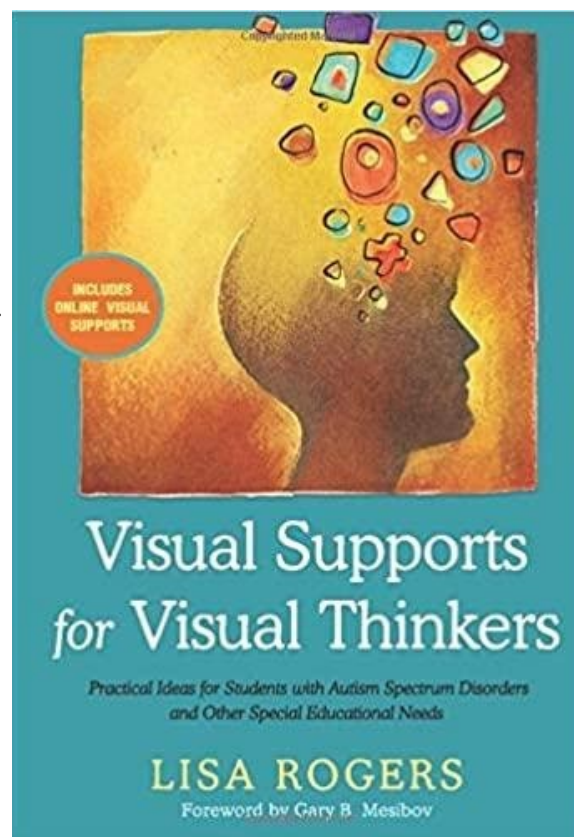
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BOOK REVIEWS

Visual Supports for Visual Thinkers

by Lisa Rogers

This book is packed with simple, effective visual tools to assist in the education of students with special education needs. They can be adapted to be used with young children and older learners with a range of educational needs, including nonverbal learners. Based on the author's years of teaching experience, the book covers how the classroom environment is laid out, how to use schedules and time planning aids, different education approaches, and the teaching of social rules and appropriate behavior. All the visual supports are clearly explained alongside examples and photos showing them in use in the classroom. The supports are also included with the accompanying online downloadable content as blank templates. Parents, teachers and other service providers for students will find many of the ideas useful.



Stuck! Strategies: What To Do When Students Get STUCK

by Janice Carroll and Terry Ellis Izraelevitz

Do your children/students ever get STUCK? Are you searching for ways to get keep them moving forward? STUCK Strategies is a treasure trove of proven methods and visual supports for supporting students with disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders. The authors' descriptions of fifteen strategies include instructions for implementation under headings like The Basics, Materials, Examples of How to Use This Strategy to Support Students Away from Stuck Behavior, and References. In addition, this book provides illustrations for easy use in school, home, and the community.

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VISUALS



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Social Skills



Put on a mask before
you leave the house



Remember to not get
too close to other
people



Leave space when
standing in line



Use hand sanitizer



Wash your hands

AuTalkz

Being in a situation where I have to lead, or speak in front of a crowd, is frightening. I dunno if this is closer to have'n Anxiety Disorder than ASD, but since anxiety disorders often come with autism, I'm cover'n it.



In school, I had to present a report to the class. I was told the report itself was excellent, but cause I freaked out and didn't meet the minimum time, my grade for it was lowered.



Even with job situations, I'd hear bout "climbing the corporate ladder". I couldn't even picture be'n in charge, or deal'n with what the managers had to deal with. Stress isn't someth we do well with.



Follow the Leader

Ironically, I'm not bad at leader positions. I had been forced into them afore, and was told I did great. But it's still out of my comfort zone. Heck, I don't even roll a tanking class when I play MMOs cause the tank is expected to lead and go first!



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