

TIP SHEET Visual Supports

Most children with autism spectrum disorders process pictures better than words. This tip sheet gives information on helping kids communicate with visuals and how to create a visual supports system.

Visuals promote language development.

- Using visual tools promotes language development by pairing an image in the child's mind with what he/she hears. This image is easier for the child to retrieve. This "picture database" promotes understanding of language and increases verbalization.

When using visual prompters, tell children what *to do* instead of what *not to do*.

- Show a picture of feet on the floor, rather than using the verbal command, "No running." Another example would be asking a child to choose from pictures of snack choices rather than asking something general like "What would you like for snack?"

Be clear; stick with pictures rather than words.

- Create simple visuals that clearly show the item or action you want to communicate. Avoid distractions such as using too much written language.

Work with a professional to decide where to start.

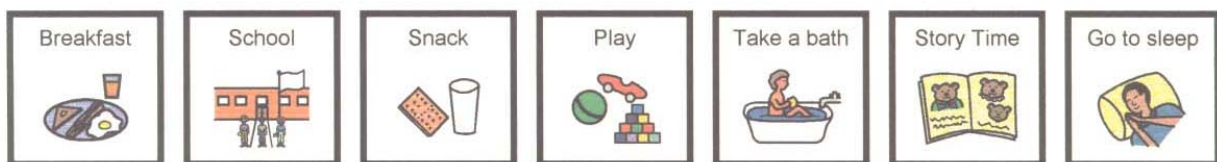
- Parents and caregivers should work with a professional to assess where to start with visuals. Developmentally, children learn to recognize photographs of themselves and their families first. Later they learn that line drawings and icons represent items or actions.

Individualize treatment to the child's needs.

- Sensory issues, color preferences and age appropriateness are critical factors in determining what will work best for a child.

Steps for creating your own Visual Supports schedule

- Sequence the picture symbols according to the day's scheduled activities (e.g., first breakfast, then bus, then school, then home, then snack, then bath).
- Follow the events in order. This establishes a predictable routine and helps children understand meaning attached to the pictures.
- Cue the children to check the schedule between activities (e.g., "one more minute of snack, then it's time to check the schedule").
- Refer to the activity being completed before moving on to the next activity. Say, "We're all done with snack," while flipping the picture over to the "all done" side. Have them touch it or flip it to orient them to the change in sequence.
- Refer to the picture of the next activity in the schedule before starting. Say, "It's time for bed" while helping them touch the picture of the next activity. This will help children understand time sequences and attach meaning between the pictures and your words.



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