

VISUAL SCHEDULES

A. Description and Purpose:

Visual schedules are an easy way to provide individuals with consistent cues about their daily activities. They provide a structure that allows individuals to anticipate what will happen next, reduce anxiety by providing the individuals with a vision of their day and promote calmness between transitions.

Sample Schedule:



Schedules may provide such information as:

- a visual representation of what regular events will happen
- new activities that may be occurring
- changes that may be occurring in regular activities
- the sequence of activities throughout a day
- when it is time to move from one activity to another

Schedules may help:

- establish the concept of being finished
- set expectations
- decrease "surprises" and reduce anxiety and distress
- establish routines as they are used over time
- provide a visible means to anticipate transitions

B. Equipment Needed:

Items needed may include: objects, photos, picture symbols, written words, lamination, scissors, Velcro, binder, cardstock or paper, writing tools, etc.

C. Setting it Up:

1. Assess the individual's level of understanding of different forms of visual communication and decide which you will use.

The hierarchy of visual communication (least abstract to most abstract):

- Objects (whole object, miniature object, partial object)
- Photos or labels from the item
- Picture Symbols (line drawings such as Boardmaker™ Symbols)
- Written Words

2. Break the day into segments and name each segment. For example, "Put away backpacks and sit on the rug", "Morning Circle Time", "Algebra", etc..

3. The schedule should be easy to create and use, accessible to the individual, durable, inexpensive, flexible, portable, visually clear (free of unnecessary details and decoration), and appropriate to their age and skill level.

4. Depending upon the skill level of the individual, the schedule may need to be presented in parts rather than the whole day at once.

5. The schedule may be arranged left to right or top to bottom.

D. Implementation:

Now that you've made the schedule, it is important to use it consistently, making it part of the individual's daily routine. The schedule should be used to preview what is going to happen throughout the individual's day and referred back to during each transition. In order for the schedule to be useful it is important to have some way of indicating that an activity has ended. This can be done by either turning the picture over, crossing it off, or placing it in a stop or finished pocket. If your individual wanders away from an activity, you can also use the schedule to guide them back.

When you first begin using the schedule, you will probably need to model the steps yourself. This will allow the individual to learn how to use the schedule by first watching you. However, as soon as possible the individual needs to actively participate in the process. For example, at first you may need to put the schedule together yourself but soon the individual might take part by placing each picture on the board as you hand it to them.

F. Teaching Tips:

- Individuals learn these skills more rapidly if some of the activities in the first schedule are familiar or already mastered.
- Select activities that have clear endings so that the individual will know when each task is completed.

G. References/Resources:

- Hodgdon, L. (1995). Visual Strategies for Improving Communication: Practical Supports for School and Home. Troy, MI: Quirk Roberts Publishing.
- McClannahan, Lynn E., Ph.D., Krantz, Patricia J., Ph.D. (1999). Activity Schedules for Children with Autism: Teaching Independent Behavior. Woodbine House, Inc.
- Quill, K. (1995). Teaching Students with Autism: Strategies to Enhance Communication and Socialization. New York: Delmar Publishers, Inc.