



# Understanding and using visual supports

Although children with ASD typically have difficulty processing spoken words, they can have strong **visual** learning abilities. Visual supports can use your child's visual strengths to increase their comprehension and communication. They can be used with both verbal and nonverbal children to support their understanding, participation and independence.

## Visual Choice Boards

Choice boards are similar to visual menus. Choice boards can be used for a variety of things including food items, leisure activities, and places to visit. Choice boards also foster communication interactions and help build a foundation for further effective communication.

- To start, just pick one part of the day or two choices that are always available for the child (i.e., milk/water, puzzles/books). Downloaded/clip pictures or, better yet, use visual props such as an empty water bottle, empty cracker box, or actual photograph of item. Post these items on a board. Make sure that the images on your child's choice board are available and on hand (you'll need to be prepared to follow through!).

## Visual Transition Objects

Visual transition objects are a tangible representation of the activity to come. They can ease your child into transitions. Visual transition objects answer two questions: "What am I doing?" and "Where are we going?"

- Visual transition objects can be used in a variety of ways. For example, if your child needs a diaper change, showing/giving your child a diaper beforehand can answer the question of "What am I doing?" Transition objects can be used in a variety of ways, including starting a routine (e.g., bedtime routine- give pajamas or teddy to child). Further, to answer the question of "Where are we going?" give your child a transition object from the activity to come (e.g., swimming lesson; give child their goggles).

## Visual Schedules (Picture Schedules)

Your child will do best when their day is structured. When children are young and are still developing their language skills, they have problems with time concepts. A picture schedule helps them to understand the structure of their activities and to keep them focused on one activity at a time.

- The use of a picture schedule to help your child anticipate the day's activities and know what is expected of them can help. For example, you can review the picture schedule for a period of the day with your child (e.g. for the morning - pictures of the following activities: brush teeth, get dressed, eat breakfast, watch a videotape, time to go to school/therapy etc). After each completed activity the picture (with Velcro on the back) is removed from the schedule and placed in an "all done" box. Then the child moves on the next activity, completes, places in "all done" box, and so on.
- The picture schedule can also be used to help your child learn new skills such as how to independently dress (e.g. a picture for each item of clothing in order of putting them on) or do chores. In addition, you can refer to the pictures when assisting your child with dressing/chores/etc.
- ! When starting out, it is best to first use the picture schedule during an established routine that your child is familiar with, like a morning routine or bedtime routine. Since your child already knows the routine, the focus will first be on learning to use the picture schedule. Once your child and you are comfortable with the picture schedule they can expand its use to another time of the day that is less structured, like after school or after dinner.

## Visual Support Resources

- Visual Strategies for Improving Communication: Practical Supports for School and Home (1995)  
By Linda Hodgdon, M.Ed., CCC-SLP
- For more information, visit <http://www.usevisualstrategies.com>.
- Do2Learn (down-loadable pictures) [www.do2learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com)

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