Visual Supports

Children's Developmental and Behavioural Supports

Does your child struggle with routines? Do you find yourself saying things over and over? Does your child have anxiety about new places, changes or transitions? Does your child become distracted, have trouble focusing, or a developmental or language delay? Do you want to increase independence or teach new skills? If you answered yes to any of these questions, visual supports can help.
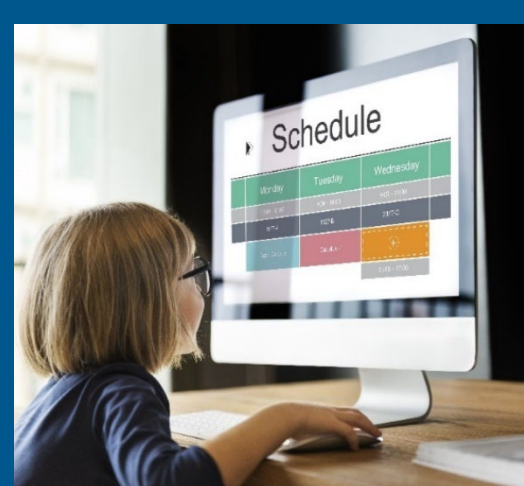
What are visual supports?

Visual supports are anything we see in the environment that helps us understand and communicate with others (Earles-Vollrath et al., 2006). Visuals can include more than pictures: body language, gestures and signs, words, physical objects.

Why use visual supports?

Visual supports are beneficial in many ways. Visual supports:

- Ensure consistency.
- Make it easier to understand what your child wants.
- Help us stay organized and help us know what's coming next.
- Promote independence.
- Are universal and can be referred to as often as necessary.
- Reduce the need to repeat instructions (ErinOak Kids, 2020).

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Visual supports should be:

- **Easy to move**: Can be transported to all environments your child may need them in by use of key rings, Velcro strips, small binders, and/or wrist bands.
- **Accessible**: Your child can access it easily and use it with who they are communicating with (e.g., not on a high shelf).
- **Easy to understand**: Does your child understand what the visuals mean? The size and number of pictures is important. Young children may need bigger pictures (e.g., if they have visual difficulties and may only be able to focus on a few pictures at a time, older children may be okay with smaller pictures, words or full page of pictures; ErinOak Kids, 2020).

First/Then board

A First/Then Board is a visual support that uses pictures to remind your child what needs to be done before they access what they want to do (Kerry's Place, n.d.).

- The "first" item is a task that is hard or non-preferred by your child.
- The "Then" item is something that your child is motivated by, such as a highly preferred activity or reward.
- These can help your child with transitions and reduce anxiety when your child transitions from one activity to the next.
- This can also be an effective strategy for children who have difficulty completing tasks
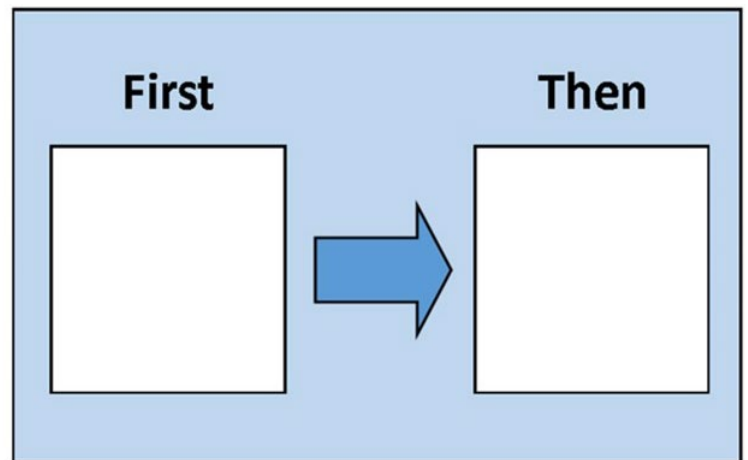
Choice Board

A Choice Board is a visual support that displays the activity options that are available to your child (Vicker, 1999). Choice boards:
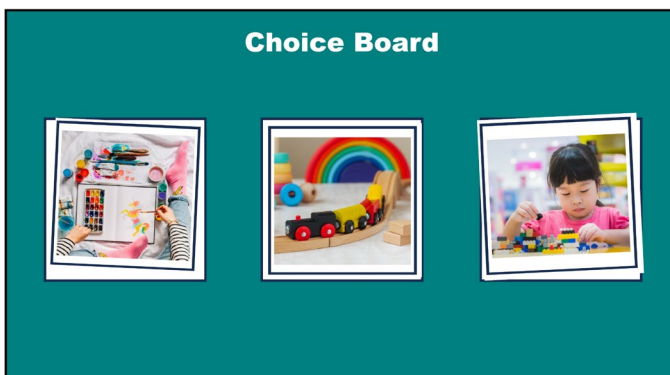
- Promote independence and encourage cooperation.
- Helps your child focus on items and activities that are available to choose from because:
  - They may only hear the last choice offered.
  - They are easily distracted.
  - They have longer processing times.
  - They may forget.

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To do/Done board

A To Do/Done Board is a visual support that uses pictures to indicate what tasks need to be completed before a reward is given. As each task is done, the picture is moved from the "To Do" column to the "Done" column. When all pictures are in the Done column, your child gets the reward/activity of their choice (Earles-Vollrath, 2006). To do/Done boards:

- Are helpful for children who have difficulties staying on track to get tasks completed.

- Can help increase your child's independence.

- Shows what activity is currently happening and which activities are happening next.

- Are helpful when many tasks need to be completed.

- Incorporate a reward/activity that can motivate your child to complete the tasks.

Teaching Stories

A Teaching Story uses visuals of preferred or relatable characters to help build skills through a story that outlines the rules and expectations of the behaviour you are trying to teach (KidsAbility, 2023).

- Also called "social stories" or "narratives".

- Short, visual stories that break down and teach a particular set of skills.

- Used to teach your child appropriate behaviour when in specific social situations (e.g. grocery shopping, going on visits, going to the doctor).

- Merely reading the story will not ensure your child will learn the new skill. The new skill should be practised often, and corrective feedback should be given when necessary.

Transition Boards

A transition board uses visual symbols to:
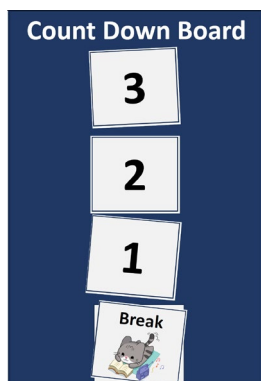
- Show when an activity is nearing completion (e.g. three more turns, three more minutes).

- Signal an upcoming transition.

- Help your child stay on task longer (e.g. three more minutes at the doctor, three more bites of dinner).

By moving each piece off the board, you visually indicate how much time is left before change occurs. The board can be utilized throughout the entire activity or used only near the end of the activity. Have your child participate in the process of removing the symbol if they are more motivated to accept the change (Hume, 2008).

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Visual Schedules

A Visual Schedule is a visual support that uses pictures and/or text to indicate what activities will happen and in what order they will happen (Surrey Place, 2020). Visual schedules:

- Provide organization, structure and predictability.

- Provide a broad overview of the day, week, or month.

- Allows your child to refer back as often as necessary to see upcoming changes, events or preferred activities.

- Shows the passage of time.

My Daily Schedule
1. Eat breakfast
2. Walk Ollie
3. Play
4. Lunch
5. Music
6. Video games
7. Play
8. Dinner
9. Read
10. Bedtime

My Morning
- Brush teeth
- Get dressed
- Medicine
- Breakfast
- Backpack
- Shoes
- School Bus

What am I doing afterschool?

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
No School	Grandma's	Soccer	Nothing	Music	Grandma's	No school

Video model and its benefits of teaching

A Video Model uses a short video clip to act as a model for a skill you are trying to teach your child (Queensland Government Autism Hub, 2020). Video models:

- Can be used to help familiarize your child with:

  - What to expect when visiting an environment (e.g. going to the dentist).

  - How to complete a self-help skill (e.g. brushing hair or tying shoes).

  - How to behave in various social settings (e.g. taking turns or greetings).
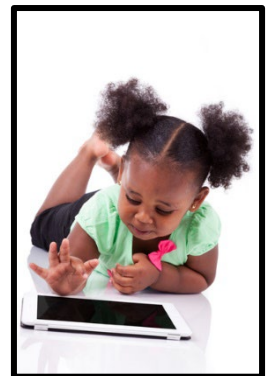
Tips for using video modelling:

Your child should be able to focus on the video and imitate actions as a prerequisite skill.

Video models are most effective if the person in the video looks similar to your child (e.g., age, skin tone, gender).

Language used should be simple, direct and developmentally appropriate.

The video clip should include the child receiving some benefit or reward after completing the task/skill. This is what will help to motivate your child!

Your child should access a similar benefit and preferred reward each time they demonstrate the target skill.

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Benefits of video modelling:

Video modelling is a great way to help teach your child new skills. Some of the benefits to using video models include:
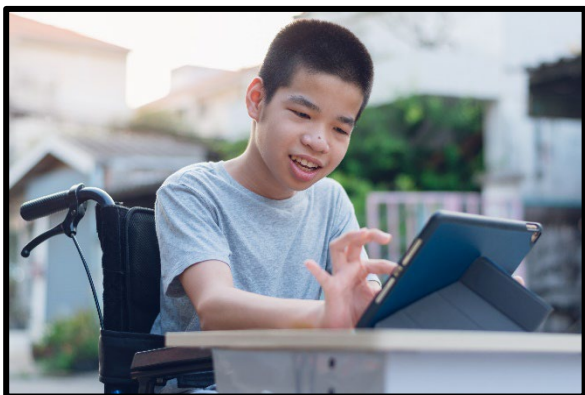
- The ability to pause the video at key points to have your child practise the skill with you.

- The ability to review the video with your child following the situation to debrief or offer feedback.

- The ability to do "point of view" video models for new activities/places (e.g. going to the grocery store).

- Recording video has become easier as you can record a video on most cellular telephones.

- Videos that are recorded on cellular telephones are easily transported between environments.

References

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Additional resources

Geneva Centre for Autism – Visual Gallery https://www.autism.net/resources/visual-gallery

ConnectABILITY.ca – Visuals Engine https://connectability.ca/visuals-engine/

Do2Learn – Resource site https://do2learn.com/

Surrey Place – How to use a Visual Schedule https://www.surreyplace.ca/resources/how-to-use-a-visual-schedule-to-support-routines/#helpful-resources

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