Tips and Ideas for Making Visuals to Support Young Children with Challenging Behavior

Why Use Visual Strategies

1. Visual strategies can be used to prevent challenging behavior.

2. Visual strategies are helpful in supporting and increasing both receptive and expressive communication.

3. Just as adults use calendars, grocery lists, and "to do" lists to enhance memory, children also benefit from visual reminders.

4. Visuals are static, meaning that they remain present after words are spoken.
   Children can refer to them once the spoken words are no longer present.
   Visuals serve as a reminder of the verbal direction.

5. Visuals assist children in knowing exactly what is expected of them (e.g., washing hands independently, cleaning up toys).

6. Regular routines, when represented visually, can be taught to children at a very young age. Once taught, the adult can fade out of the routine and allow the child to self-monitor the routine to completion.

7. For many children, visual supports are most beneficial when used in conjunction with spoken language and/or sign language.

8. Visuals can act as a cue to teach appropriate behavior or new skills for children who are having challenging behavior.

Picture Tips

1. Remember that children communicate and understand at **different levels.**

2. Determine your child's **"visual stage"** (or combination of):

    *   **Object Stage**: use of actual objects and items for communication needs.
    *   **Photo Stage:** use of real photographs (photo, digital, scanned, magazines, catalogs, coupon ads, Izone Camera, which prints out mini "Polaroid" pictures with adhesive on the back side of the picture) for communication needs.
    *   **Picture Symbolic Stage:** use of colored line drawings (hand drawn or commercially produced) for communication needs.
    *   **Line Drawing Stage:** use of black and white line drawings (hand drawn or commercially produced) for communication needs.
    *   **Text Stage:** use of written words and/or numbers for communication needs.

3. Use **written text** along with photographs, pictures, and line drawings to promote reading. Written text also assures that everyone interacting with the child uses the same language for a particular item.

4. Present visuals from **left to right** if your child can scan horizontally.
    Horizontal orientation will also prepare the child for reading. *Note: Some children are vertical scanners. In this case, present visuals from top to bottom.*

5. **Photographing tips:**
    Place item or object on a **solid/high contrasting background** when taking photo.
    Note: If you are trying to communicate "go potty" and you take a photo of the toilet, try to avoid including the bathtub in the picture. The child may focus on the tub instead of the intended picture of the toilet. Try to take the photograph from the **child's perspective**.

6. **Preparing the picture visuals:**
    *   Remember to make the "picture" sturdy, **easy to handle,** and durable.
    *   Either print on cardstock, or glue to a file folder, then cover with contact paper or laminate.

7. **Pictures** can be obtained from a variety of places:
    Photographs, camera, digital images, computer scanning, magazines, catalogs, coupons, advertisements, Izone Camera, Internet sites, commercial computer programs, etc.

    Picture Symbols & Line Drawings: computer scanning, magazines, catalogs, coupon ads, Internet sites, commercial computer programs, coloring books and dittos, hand drawn pictures, etc.
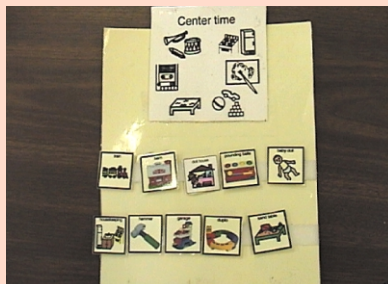
Boardmaker ©
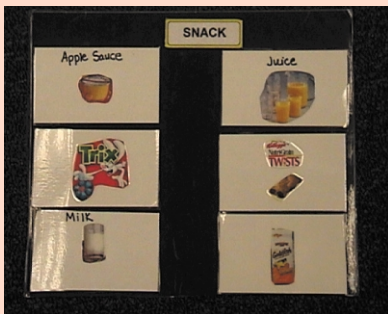activity picture choices on file folder.

Banjo   Shaker

Digital Camera

Combination of downloaded
Boardmaker © and Internet
pictures on a center choice poster
board

Snack choices with pictures from
food containers and coupon
advertisements.

Choice Charts

1. Allowing for choice making gives children **opportunities for socially appropriate power and control.**

2. **Give choices** at every opportunity possible. ("Do you want the blue cup or the red cup?")

3. If you don't have a visual that represents a particular choice, **use the actual item** or a representation of the choices (e.g., food choice, art materials, toy pieces, video choices).

4. When first introducing choices, **start with 2 or 3 choices;** then, gradually over time and communication progress, increase the amount of choices offered at one time.

5. Examples of **Choice Boards** commonly used (Start with one category at a time):
   • Foods & Drinks
   • Toy Choices
   • Activity Choices (tickle game, chase, computer, swim)
   • Places (restaurants, library, stores, park, beach)
   • Material Choices (such as for art: colors, utensils, media)
   • Clothing & Shoes
   • Actions (stop, do, sit, eat, drink, sleep, do it again, my turn, take a break)
   • People
   • Songs

6. Choice Boards or Charts need to be placed in a location that is **accessible to the child** (at eye level and within reach) for quick and easy use.

7. **Incorporate a child's preference,** when possible, in choice charts and choice making. For instance, if the child likes "Blue's Clues," place "Blue's Clues" stickers along the border to increase attention (unless it is distracting).
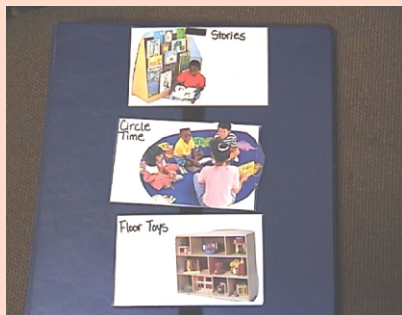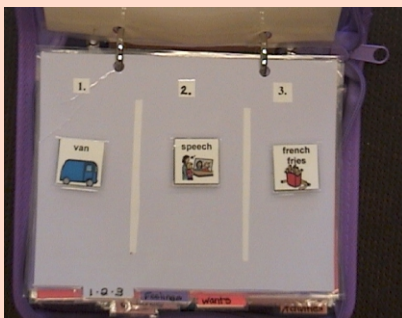
Binder with schedule pictures from catalog and glued on index cards


Class photo schedule
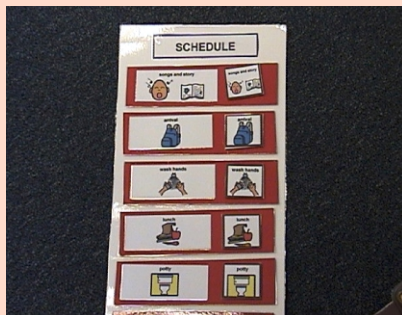
Boardmaker© schedule pictures with removable miniatures to carry while transitioning from one location to another

Mini photo album for carrying visuals

How to Make a Visual Schedule

1. **Gather Materials:** Scissors, glue stick, poster board, clear contact paper, Velcro, pictures (photographs, pictures from magazines, computer programs, cereal boxes, household supplies, restaurant napkins, placemats, wrappers, etc.) *TIP: Every picture should have a label so the child can associate the written text with the picture.*

2. **Choose pictures** for the schedule you wish to create. Keep in mind that a visual schedule is used to assist children with transitions and anticipating activities throughout the day. It can be as specific or as general as the children may need, and can be for various amounts of time. For example, a visual schedule may outline parts of a day, half-day, or an entire day.

3. **Cut** your pictures and poster board squares the same size. Keep in mind your child's developmental level (see "Picture Tips" to determine your child's visual picture stage).

4. **Glue** the pictures on poster board squares for durability.

5. **Laminate or cover** the pictures with clear contact paper.

6. **Velcro** a small piece of Velcro on the back center of each picture. *TIP: Always use the same type of Velcro for pictures and the opposite kind for the schedule board.*

7. **Create a strip** to hold the schedule. Cut out poster board long enough to hold all the pictures for the block of time you are creating a schedule.

   You may create a pocket at the bottom/end that represents "finished" or "all done." *TIP: If your child visually tracks up and down, you will want the schedule to be vertical. If your child visually tracks from side to side, you will want to make a horizontal schedule (horizontal schedules promote reading skills). Laminate the strip, and place a long piece of Velcro down the center.*

8. **Velcro** the pictures to the schedule in the order they will occur. Teach the child how to use the schedule by explaining and modeling how to use the pictures. Remember to always include changes in the schedule and to review them with the child. When setting up the schedule, you can either turn the pictures over as you move through the schedule to indicate that the activity is finished, or you can remove the picture entirely from the schedule, and place it in a pocket with the word "finished" on it. If you are going to turn over the picture as you complete each schedule item, make sure to put Velcro on the front without covering the picture/text. This will enable the picture to adhere to the Velcro strip, and then once the day is complete, you can easily set up the schedule for the next day by turning all the cards back over to show the pictures.

9. **Use the schedule!** Keep the schedule located in a convenient place at the child's eye level, to promote consistent use. Use the schedule as part of your routine.

10. **Celebrate!** Be sure to celebrate your success and the child's success. Acknowledge the child for following the schedule appropriately! Good luck!
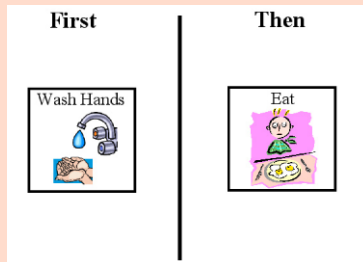
Microsoft Clipart© pictures on a simple 2 step transition "FIrst/Then" board.

Activities pictured on the left side represent 2 activities within circle time, then the bold line represents the transition to the next place.

Activities pictured on the left side represent a mini schedule of activities prior to the transition to the activity pictured on the right.

Schedule pictured on the left side represent activities within circle time, then the bold line represents the transition to the next place.

How to Make a First/Then Board

A First/Then board can be used to communicate a sequence of events or to reinforce completion of a nonpreferred activity. A First/Then board can be used in a variety of ways:

- Assist with transition from one activity to another.
- Assist in completing non-preferred tasks by reinforcing with a preferred activity.
- Breaking a large schedule or sequence of events into smaller steps.
- First/Then boards can be broken down into two-step activities. For example, "FIRST clean up, THEN go outside."
- First/Then boards can be broken down into a sequence of steps followed by a reinforcer or the next transition. For example, "FIRST color-cut-glue, THEN computer."

Making the First/Then Board

1. **Gather the materials:** Scissors, glue stick, poster board or file folder, clear contact paper, Velcro, pictures (photographs, pictures from magazines, computer programs, cereal boxes, household supplies, restaurant menus or placemats, wrappers, etc.). *TIP: Every picture should have a label so your child can associate the written text with the picture.*

2. **Collect pictures** to represent activities (refer to section on Picture Tips, (H3b.2, 2/7), to determine your child's visual stage).

3. **Cut the pictures** out and paste on poster board for durability or print on cardstock.

4. **Laminate or cover** in contact paper.

5. **Use a file folder or cut the poster board** large enough to hold several of the pictures. Divide the sections by making a vertical line to separate the first/then sides. Laminate or cover in contact paper.

6. **Velcro** small pieces of Velcro on the back of the pictures. *TIP: Make sure you use the same side of Velcro on all pictures. Next, place a strip of opposite Velcro on both sides of the First/Then board.*

7. As you **use the "First/Then"** board with your child, try to place a reinforcing activity or item on the "then" side of the board. This will increase the likelihood that the child will complete the activities on the "first" side of the board. (See samples.) As each activity is completed, turn the picture over to indicate that the activity is "finished."

8. Once your child successfully follows the First/Then board activities, **change the pictures** according to the activity. When using a First/Then schedule, remember to model the behavior. It shouldn't take long before your child understands the First/Then concept! If your child is not following the First/Then board, consider the visual stage you have selected by referring to the "Picture Tips" section. It is also possible that the activity on the "then" side is not reinforcing for your child.

9. **Celebrate your success!**
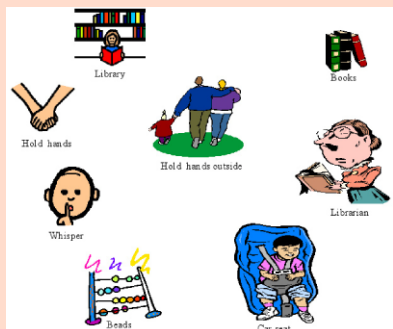
Other Creative Ideas for Use of Visual Strategies

Routine Activity Sequences
This is an example of the tooth brushing routine in child's home. The pictures are of his brother to increase the likelihood that the child would attend to the visual and also to give his brother a sense of involvement.

Cue Cards
Cue cards are placed on a ring with "stop" on one side and the cue (shown in sample picture) on the other side. The ring of cues could easily be attached to a key ring, necklace, or belt loop for easy access for cuing.

Activity Analysis Using Clip Art
This is an example of the steps to follow when washing hands.

These pictures were placed on small cue cards on a ring to cue a child in the library.

These cues were hand drawn and placed on a ring to use to cue a child at swim lessons.

Turn-Taking Charts
Children place their names with pictures on the turn chart to indicate order at the computer. As turn is completed at the sound of a timer, the child places his or her name/picture in the "all done" pocket, and the next child takes a turn.

Reminder Chart
Using the child's preference of traffic signals teachers created, a reminder chart to cue him to "stop computer," "go pee-pee," then "go back to the computer."

Stop Signs
Stop signs can be used on items, cabinets, and doors to help cue children when items or activities are "not a choice." A stop sign is placed on the door to remind children to "Stop and stay inside."

Feeling Charts
Feeling pictures in an easy-to-carry portable book act as a visual reminder when children are trying to express feelings. The child can either point to the appropriate "feeling picture" or say what is being felt.

Other Possible Ideas
Job Charts, Toy/Activity Self Labels, People Locators