

Module: Visual Supports

Overview of Visual Supports

Hume, K. (2008). *Overview of visual supports*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, The University of North Carolina.

Visual supports are any tool presented visually that supports an individual as he or she moves through the day. Visual supports might include, but are not limited to, pictures, written words, objects within the environment, arrangement of the environment or visual boundaries, schedules, maps, labels, organization systems, timelines, and scripts. They are used across settings to support individuals with ASD (National Research Council, 2001).

Evidence

Visual supports meet the evidence-based practice criteria within the early childhood, elementary, and middle school age groups.

With what ages are visual supports effective?

Visual supports can be implemented with individuals across the age range, beginning in preschool and extending through middle school age. Effective visual supports in early childhood settings include visual schedules to increase task engagement, visual scripts to encourage social interaction, and picture cues to support play skill development (Krantz & McClannahan, 1998; Massey & Wheeler, 2000; Morrison, Sainato, BenChaaban, & Endo, 2002). In elementary and middle school, visual supports such as schedules and picture cues have proven effective in reducing transition time, increasing on-task behavior, and in completing self-help in the home (Bryan & Gast, 2000; Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2000; MacDuff, Krantz, & McClannahan, 1993).

What skills or intervention goals can be addressed by visual supports?

Visual supports target a number of adaptive behavior skills, including task engagement, independent performance, transitions across activities, and increasing response chain length. Visual supports have also proven effective in increasing skills across curriculum areas, including the demonstration of play skills, social interaction skills, and social initiation. In addition, visual supports have been beneficial in reducing self-injurious behavior.

In what settings can visual supports be effectively used?

Visual supports have been used effectively in classroom settings and home settings. Visual supports are intended to be used as one component of comprehensive programming for individuals with ASD.

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Evidence Base

The studies cited in this section provide the basis upon which this practice was determined to meet the NPDC on ASD's criteria as an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive and other quality studies may exist but were not found in our search.

Preschool

Dauphin, M., Kinney, E. M., & Stromer, R. (2004). Using video enhanced activity schedules and matrix training to teach sociodramatic play to a child with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 6*, 238–250.

Johnston, S., Nelson, C., Evans, J., & Palazolo, K. (2003). The use of visual supports in teaching young children with autism spectrum disorder to initiate interactions. *AAC: Augmentative & Alternative Communication, 19*, 86-104.

Krantz, P. J., & McClannahan, L. E. (1998). Social interaction skills for children with autism: A script-fading procedure for beginning readers. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 31*, 191-202.

Massey, G., & Wheeler, J. (2000). Acquisition and generalization of activity schedules and their effects on task engagement in a young child with autism in an inclusive preschool classroom. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 35*, 326-335.

Morrison, R., Sainato, D., BenChaaban, D., & Endo, S. (2002). Increasing play skills of children with autism using activity schedules and correspondence training. *Journal of Early Intervention, 25*, 58-72.

Elementary and Middle School Age

Bryan, L., & Gast, D. (2000). Teaching on-task and on-schedule behaviors to high functioning children with autism via picture activity schedules. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 30*, 553-567.

Dettmer, S., Simpson, R., Myles, B., & Ganz, J. (2000). The use of visual supports to facilitate transitions of students with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 15*, 163-170.

Krantz, P., MacDuff, M., & McClannahan, L. (1993). Programming participation in family activities for children with autism: Parent's use photographic activity schedules. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 26*, 137-138.

MacDuff, G., Krantz, P., & McClannahan, L. (1993). Teaching children with autism to use photographic activity schedules: Maintenance and generalization of complex response chains. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 26*, 89-97.

O'Reilly, M., Sigafos, J., Lancioni, G., Edrisinha, C., & Andrews, A. (2005). An
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10/2010

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examination of the effects of a classroom activity schedule on levels of self-injury and engagement for a child with severe autism. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 35, 305-311.

Pierce, K., & Schreibman, L. (1994). Teaching daily living skills to children with autism in unsupervised settings through pictorial self-management. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 27, 471-481.

Schmit, J., Alper, S., Raschke, D., & Ryndak, D. (2000). Effects of using a photographic cueing package during routine school transitions with a child who has autism. *Mental Retardation*, 38, 131–137.

Vaughn, B., & Horner, H. (1995). Effects of concrete versus verbal choice systems on problem behavior. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 11, 89-92.

Selected Additional References

Cohen, M. J., & Sloan, D. L. (2007). *Visual supports for people with autism: A guide for parents and professionals*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Mesibov, G., Shea, V., & Schopler, E. (2005). *The TEACCH approach to autism spectrum disorders*. New York: Plenum Press.

National Research Council (2001). *Educating children with autism*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Quill, K. A. (1997). Instructional considerations for young children with autism: The rationale for visually cued instruction. *Journal of Autism and Other Developmental Disorders*, 27(6), 697-714.

Tissot, C., & Evans, R. (2003). Visual teaching strategies for children with autism. *Early Child Development and Care*, 174(4), 425-433.