

# **VISUAL STRATEGIES**

## **What are Visual Strategies?**

Visual strategies are ways to improve the communication process by using supports that can be seen. Four common types of visual supports are:

1. Natural Environmental Cues  
*Examples* include: signs, logos, menus, and the location of people
2. Body Language  
*Examples* include: eye contact, facial expressions, touching, and body stance
3. Traditional Tools to Provide Information and Organization  
*Examples* include: calendars, planners, maps, telephone books, and to-do-lists
4. Specifically Designed Tools to Meet Specific Needs  
*An Example* is a visual schedule of the morning routine at school

## **Who are Visual Strategies for?**

Visual Strategies have been successful with individuals who have a wide array of communication skills and abilities. Verbal and non-verbal individuals of various disabilities can use visual strategies to varying degrees.

Individuals can use visual strategies with educators, resident care providers, families, friends, and others in the community with ease.

## **Representation Systems**

A representation system is the way in which objects and activities are depicted in a visual form. They are the symbols that are used to convey information. Examples of a representation include written words, line drawings, photographs, and signs.

## **Components of Good Visual Tools**

- Purposeful—created to help remediate a clearly defined, specific need
- Planned—created with “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” and “how,” decided prior to using
- Contain a combination of representations  
Words + Pictures = best strategy
- Simple, but clear
- Individualized
- Creative
- Highly motivating to use

## **Benefits of Visual Strategies**

- Facilitates intentional communication
- Increases the individual’s attention
- Easy to use and requires little training
- Inexpensive
- Individualized
- Can foster word recognition
- Highly motivating to use
- Can quickly learn sequences to complete a task or routine
- Increases independence—use visual supports rather than being dependent on caregiver
- Can complete complex tasks by referring to the visually depicted steps of the tasks

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## **Purposes of Visual Strategies**

There are four broad goals of using a visual strategy:

1. To Provide Information *Such as using a calendar or schedule*
2. To Give Directions *Such as using gestures, physical prompting, visual tools, or pointing to convey instructions*
3. To Organize the Environment *Such as labeling objects and places things belong or creating lists of things to remember*
4. To Use “Visual Bridges” that Encourage a Connection between Environments  
*For Example, a student may have an on-going log to share between home and school. In the log, the student could circle the pictured events that were done that day or complete the following sentence with a word or picture “Today, I \_\_\_\_\_ at school.”*

## **Typical Visuals Schedule Include**

- What activities will happen
- What activities will not happen
- Sequence of events to complete a task or routine
- Changes in a routine
- When to stop an activity and start another

## **To Create & Use a Visual Schedule**

1. Divide the time (i.e., day) into sections
2. Give each section a name
3. Pick a representation system
4. Select the format
5. Make a plan to implement
6. Set goals for use
7. Fade out or change the representation system as need
8. Generalize the skills learned to other settings

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\*Adapted from: Hodgdon, L. (1995). Visual Strategies for Improving Communication. Volume 1: Practical Supports for School and Home. Troy, MI: Quirk Roberts Publishing.

## **For More Information**

Please visit one of the following websites:

[www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com)

<http://changenet.com/~onemom/index.html>

[http://www.pa.net/scpa\\_asa/article13.htm](http://www.pa.net/scpa_asa/article13.htm)

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