

Visual Supports Checklist

Visual supports are one of the most frequently recommended strategies to support youth with complex needs. Visual supports are used to enhance communication, social situations, organization, structure, and predictability. Use the following checklist to review the supports available for an individual and to identify opportunities to enhance your toolkit of visual supports.

Visual Schedules

Visual schedules visually communicate what is to occur and in what sequence. These can be created with objects, photos, pictures, icons, written words, or any other visual representation that the person understands. These can be a simple “First-Then” schedule, a schedule for a portion of the day, or schedule for the entire day.

Visual Routines, Reminders, and Directions

Visual routines and directions visually describe the steps in an activity or how to complete a routine. This can include steps to a bathroom routine, school transitions, steps in a game, recipes, and more. These assist in activities and routines where support staff may be needing to prompt through each step. Pictures, written words, icons, or other visual tools can be used in these supports. The support may be in the form of a checklist, a notecard, dry erase board, or look similar to a visual schedule.

Expressive Communication Supports

Expressive communication supports enhance the youth’s ability to communicate needs, wants, and feelings to others. For some youth this may be in the form of a high-tech communication device. However, for many it is having available low-tech visual tools for choice-making. This includes choices for objects, activities, foods, people, etc. It also includes visual systems that help the youth communicate how they feel emotionally and physically.

Receptive Communication Supports

Receptive communication supports enhance the youth’s ability to understand information and messages from others. Use of extensive visual information to explain concepts taught in school can enhance learning. Using visual icons or pictures that support staff can point to while speaking to the youth can clarify messages. Pointing to or holding an object that is the focus on the message is another way of using a visual support. Sign language or gestures also help some youth understand the meaning of the communication from others.

Visual Supports for Social Situations

Many strategies for supporting social interactions and understanding social situations involve using visual supports. Instead of verbally explaining the complexities of social interaction, using pictures can be helpful. Cartooning with 'speaking bubbles' and 'talking bubbles' can create awareness of how thoughts and words may be different. Video modeling is an effective tool for studying social situations. Other strategies that use visuals include social narratives, Power Cards, Social Autopsy, role playing, and modeling.

Organizational Supports

Organizational supports are a common visual support that many people use and include items such as clocks, calendars, and planners. These and other tools help keep us aware of the day or week, what may be occurring, and when. These can be in the form of apps on a phone or 'hard copy' items in the classroom or home. Work systems to help a person move through a task are also visual supports. Labeled bins to organize clothing or personal items and folders to organize school materials can be helpful.

Environmental Structure

Like organizational supports, environmental structure helps everyone. Examples include labeling areas of a room to explain the use, dividers to help visually communicate boundaries, maps to move around a building, and labels on cabinets or bins to identify their use. Keeping the environmental structure consistent is also helpful.

Review and Plan

What types of visual support have been well established in the classroom, home, and other locations where the youth spends time?

What type of visual supports could be enhanced by modifications?

What types of visual supports have yet to be explored?

Select one or two items to plan, create, or modify. Evaluate the effectiveness of the tool to learn what works for the youth. Continue to build your visual supports toolkit by using what works for the youth and by engaging with the resources in the [*Communication Navigation Essentials*](#) toolkit.