

## What Is It?

Visual supports are tools (e.g., pictures, videos, drawings, symbols, objects) that support children's learning. Adults can use visual supports in many ways to support children's participation in daily routines. Visual supports promote self-regulation, help children learn steps of daily routines, and help children prepare for transitions. Common examples of individualized visual supports include schedules, first-then boards, choice boards, visual token economies, alternative communication systems, and emotion regulation supports.

## When to Use It

- To support a child who has difficulties understanding what to do during an activity or engages in challenging behavior to avoid an activity.
- To help a child attend during adult-led activities or caregiving routines.
- To prepare a child for difficult transitions or unexpected schedule changes.

## Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Use visual supports universally to support all children with common routines, rules, expectations, transitions, and/or learning goals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Identify the common routines, rules, expectations, transitions, and/or learning goals that the individual child has difficulty with.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Select or create a visual that will best support the child during this activity (e.g., line drawings or photos). If possible, embed the child's preferences into the individualized visual support (e.g., a visual token economy with basketball tokens for a child that loves sports).
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Acknowledge the child's use of the visual by providing positive descriptive feedback.
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Teach the child to use the visual support. Adults may pair a verbal direction with the visual.
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Use the visual support consistently during the teaching phase and collect data on the child's behavior and engagement. Adults may fade the use of the visual support and replace it with just verbal or gestural reminders as the child learns to navigate the activity. Remember, though, that some visual supports are appropriate to use permanently (e.g., schedules).

## Example

*Kym uses a visual support with picture icons to help all children in her preschool classroom with a five-step arrival routine. Alexei, a 5-year-old, still has difficulty participating in the routine. He cries during the daily sign-in routine and runs away when asked to wash hands. After observing the routine over several days, Kym decides to simplify the routine for Alexei. She identifies the most important steps: Enter the room, put backpack in cubby, and wash hands. Kym takes pictures of each step of the routine, cuts them out separately (Classroom, Cubby, Wash) and makes a small, laminated schedule for Alexei. She also adds an activity as the last step in the routine she believes will be reinforcing and fun for Alexei: Play. She puts Velcro on each photo and attaches them to a laminated piece of cardstock, so the images can be easily removed when completed. The next day, Kym greets Alexei as he gets off the bus, shows him the schedule, and says, "First step is classroom." Alexei walks with Kym into the classroom. Kym tells Alexei, "Thanks for walking with me to class!" and she physically prompts him to remove the classroom picture from the board. Kym then says, "Second step is to put backpack in cubby." Kym helps Alexei take off his backpack and as soon as he puts his backpack away Kym says, "Good job putting your backpack away! Cubby is finished," while prompting him to remove the Cubby picture. She then asks, "What's next?" as she points to the image of the sink and walks with Alexei to the sink. Once there, she points to the poster showing handwashing steps and Alexei begins the routine. Once finished she says, "Your hands are clean! Washing is done. What's next? Play!" She watches as Alexei moves to his favorite area of the room. Over the next few weeks, Kym uses the schedule each day and when Alexei is consistently participating in the routine, the team tapes the visual to Alexei's cubby and refers to it as needed.*

## How to Increase Effectiveness

- Keep in mind that visual supports are most effective when they are easy to follow.
- Break down complex routines into small, discrete steps and present them visually.
- Match the number of visuals to the child's developmental needs. For some children, two images or steps may be enough.

## Resources

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.

National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder. (2015). [Visual supports step-by-step guide](#).