

## What Is It?

Visual supports are tools (e.g., pictures, photos, videos, drawings, symbols, objects) that support children's learning. Visual supports can be used universally with a group of children or individually with a single child. Common examples of universal visual supports include daily visual schedules, mini-schedules of routines (e.g., hand-washing steps), visual cues to designate different classroom areas or routines (e.g., blue tape on the floor for lining up), social-emotional supports (e.g., pictures of faces expressing different emotions), and posters of expectations or rules.

## When to Use It

- To support receptive and expressive communication.
- To teach children routines, rules, and expectations.
- To help children remain focused during adult-led activities or caregiving routines.
- To prepare children for transitions and changes in schedules.
- To teach children how to self-regulate.

## Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Identify common routines, rules, expectations, transitions, and/or learning goals that all children should learn.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Select or create a visual support that represents the routine, rule, expectation, transition, and/or learning goal. Use photos, line drawings, clip art, objects, etc. to create visuals that are relevant for your setting and children will easily understand.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Decide how adults will encourage children to attend to and use the visual support.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Teach children to use the visual support and refer to it throughout the day. Adults may pair a verbal direction with the visual.
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Adults may fade the use of some visual supports and replace them with just verbal or gestural reminders as children learn to navigate the routine. Remember, though, that some visual supports should always be available (e.g., daily visual schedule, classroom rule visuals, mini-schedules about handwashing steps).

## Example

*Kym is a new preschool teacher who is passionate about teaching young children. Currently, Kym teaches in a half-day public preschool classroom and the transition into the classroom for both her morning and afternoon groups is challenging. Kym wants to focus on ensuring that the children in her preschool classes start the day successfully. She decides to use visual supports to help teach children (and other adults that work and volunteer in the classroom) a consistent arrival routine. To help children learn the arrival routine, she creates a visual schedule of the routine that includes five steps: say "good morning" to your teacher, enter the classroom, put your backpack in your cubby, wash hands, and complete the sign in activity. During the first few weeks of class, she shows the children the arrival visual during the first circle activity and playfully asks them to practice it. She also posts a copy of the visual outside the classroom so children can see it as they are arriving. She stands outside of the classroom door before each class to individually greet children and remind them to look at the visual as they start their day. Whenever Kym or other adults in the classroom see children independently completing steps of the morning arrival routine, they provide positive descriptive feedback. Within a few short weeks, most children are able to successfully complete the routine independently or with only a few reminders from adults.*

## How to Increase Effectiveness

- A daily visual schedule is a visual support that should always be used. Create and display a daily visual schedule that all adults and children can easily reference.
- Keep in mind that visual supports are most effective when they are easy to follow and children understand how to complete each step independently.
- Break down complex routines into visual steps to be completed sequentially.

## 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](#).