



FACT SHEET #58

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PROJECT ACCESS

Missouri's educational
 leader in autism support

VISUAL SUPPORTS

Visual supports, what are they and how can I use them in my classroom? Visual supports are one of the evidence-based interventions identified by Missouri Autism Guidelines Initiative (MAGI) and is defined as tools that enable a learner to independently track events and activities. Visual supports can be any tool that is presented visually to offer guidance to an individual as he or she moves through the day.

Visual Supports might include but are not limited to:

- Pictures
- Written words
- Schedules
- Arrangement of the environment or visual boundaries
- Labels
- Organization systems
- Objects within the environment
- Maps or timelines

Utilizing visual supports in your classroom will enhance classroom design, communicate clear expectations, and support routines and schedules not only for students but for staff as well.

Enhancing classroom design

When you use visual supports in your classroom to enhance classroom design it helps maximize classroom space by creating clearly defined boundaries, accessibility, and organization.

Clearly defined boundaries provide learners with designated specific learning areas throughout the classroom. This allows students to understand each learning space is utilized for something different and helps define what happens or what is expected in each area. Examples of visual supports for enhancing classroom design include but are not limited to:

- Bookshelves
- Dividers (can make out of PVC pipe and fabric)
- Rugs/mats
- Curtains
- Specific learning area labels/signs
- Tape on the floor

Example of bookshelves and area labels used as a visual support to separate learning spaces:



Using visual supports to enhance accessibility allows for needed materials and items to be readily available to staff and students. When you have the materials you need directly available in each learning space it increases on task behavior, task completion, and the likelihood of student's staying in the designated area. Picture examples of accessibility:



Organization is an important aspect of any classroom; the added use of visual supports can help create a neat well-structured environment that is less distracting for students. When students know where items are located and where to return them it will help increase independence.

Keeping the classroom organized can also be incorporated into daily classroom jobs for students. An example of how you can utilize visual supports to enhance organization is to use picture labels in learning areas such as: classroom libraries, toy/play centers, sensory areas, and work task or functional skills areas. This will allow students to have a visual as to where desired items are and a reminder where to return them.

Communicate Clear Expectations

Often, students with autism are able to understand and process visual directives and expectations far better than when the same directives or expectations are given verbally. It would then make sense to use visual supports to convey classroom/school expectations, center or learning space expectations, task demands, sensory or reinforcement choices, and seating options to name a few. If a student doesn't understand what is expected of him/her then the likelihood of the student completing the given directive or expectation is diminished. Even students who are more cognitively able struggle to look at their surrounds and imitate what their peers are doing. They too still need those visual supports as reminders.

Visual Supports might include but are not limited to:

- Visual strip of classroom expectations for students in the general education setting
- Poster or ring of pictures with behavior expectations
- Task strip with visual social skill reminders or expectations
- Work task strip (first, then)
- Token board utilized for completing directives with a given reinforcer
- Visual timers

Enhance Routines and Schedules

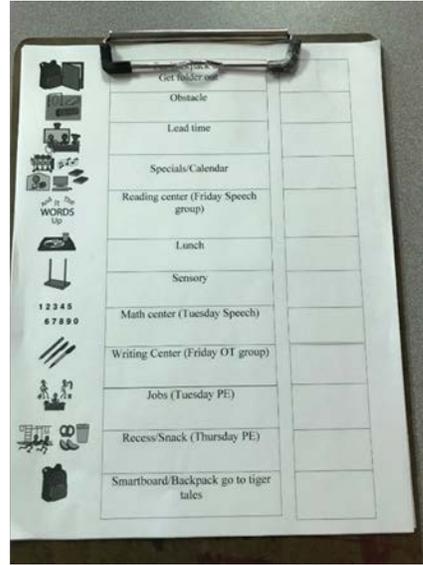
Routines and schedules provide much needed structure for the classroom setting, when visual supports are incorporated into them it increases the likelihood of student success throughout the school day. Utilizing visuals for routines and schedules allows a student to take the abstract concept of time and put it into a concrete form they can better understand. It also communicates to the student what happens next, what to do during that time, and what happens when they are finished. This allows the student to have a better sense of security instead of fearing the unknown.

Visual Supports might include but are not limited to:

- Picture schedules on a ring, folder, or clipboard
- Written schedule on a folder or clip board
- Center schedules

- Work task strips
- Job charts
- Visual Timers

Picture examples of visual supports for schedules or routines:



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