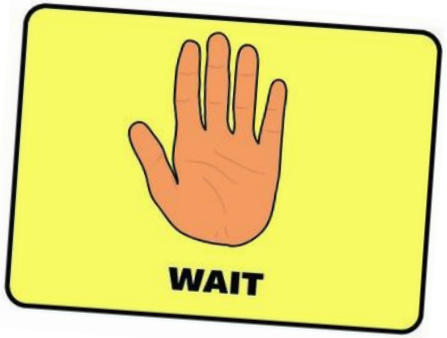
Visual Supports for children with autism

By Christy Taylor, Program Specialist YCUSD

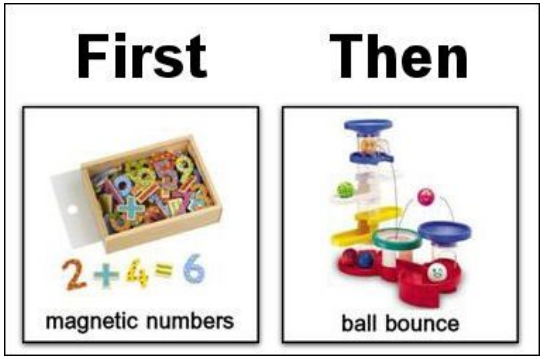
What are visual supports



A visual support refers to using a picture or other visual item to communicate with a child who has difficulty understanding or using language. Visual supports can be photographs, drawings, objects, written words, or lists.

Two main purposes of visual supports:

1. To help parents communicate better with their child.
2. Help your child communicate better with others.



Why are visual supports important?

They help with three main things:

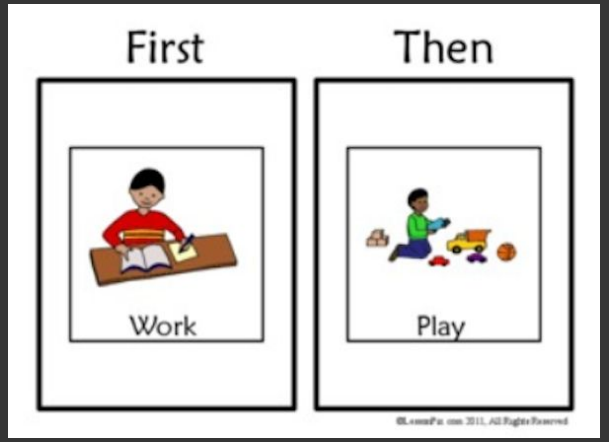
- Interacting Socially
- Using Language
- Limited interests or repetitive behaviors

First - Then Board

- A non-preferred task followed by a preferred task.
- Decide what task you want your child to complete first (“first”) and then what activity they can do immediately following (“then”).

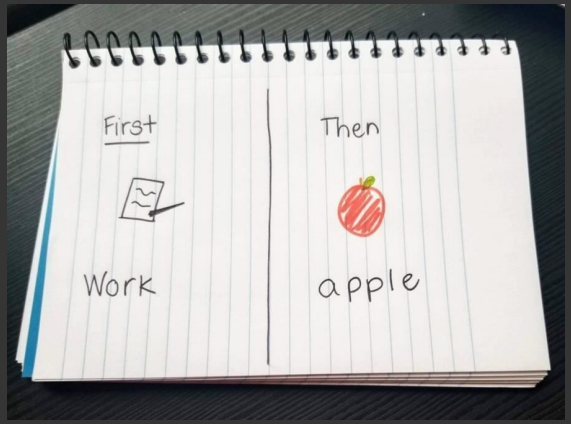
Tip

This is helpful in teaching children to follow directions and learn new skills. It can motivate them to do activities they do not like.


First
Then
Work
Play

FIRST
THEN
cut hair
finished

First
Then
Math
iPad


First
Then
Work
apple

Visual Schedule

- A representation of what is going to happen throughout the day or within a task or activity.
- Is helpful for breaking down a task that has multiple steps to ensure the teaching and compliance of those steps.

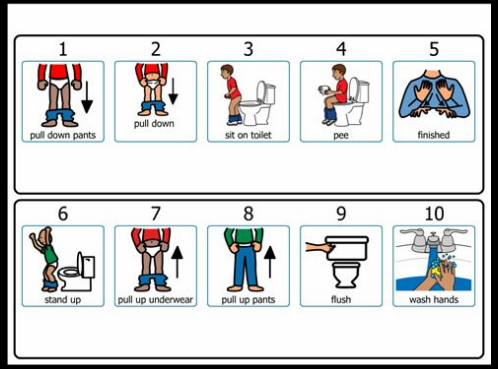
Tip

This helps to reduce anxiety and rigidity surrounding transitions.

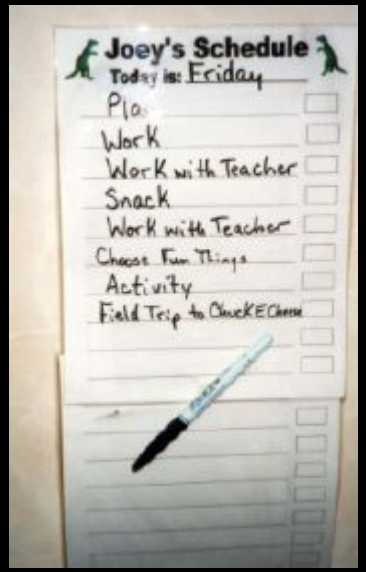
good morning
awake
toilet
breakfast
grooming
get dressed

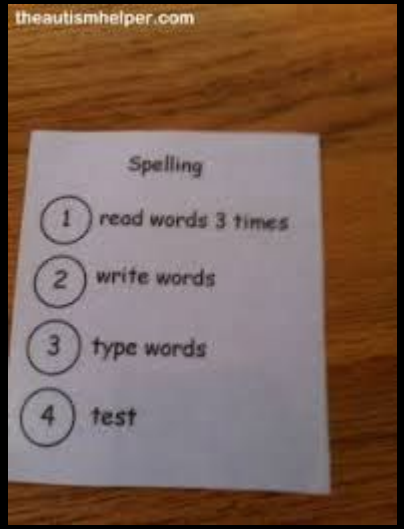
At Home Daily Schedule
BreakFast
Academics
Outside Play
Lunch
Story Time
Rest Time / Quiet Time
Shhh
Academics
Creative Time / Free Play
Outside Play

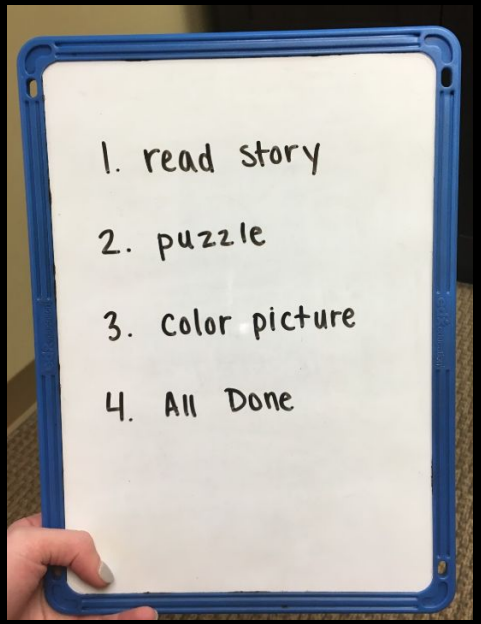
go to the toilet
brush teeth
undress
take a bath
get into bed
bedtime story
take a shower
put on night clothes
goodnight kiss
lights out
wash face
dry
go upstairs
night night!
ink saving Eco


1
pull down pants
2
pull down
3
sit on toilet
4
pee
5
finished
6
stand up
7
pull up underwear
8
pull up pants
9
flush
10
wash hands

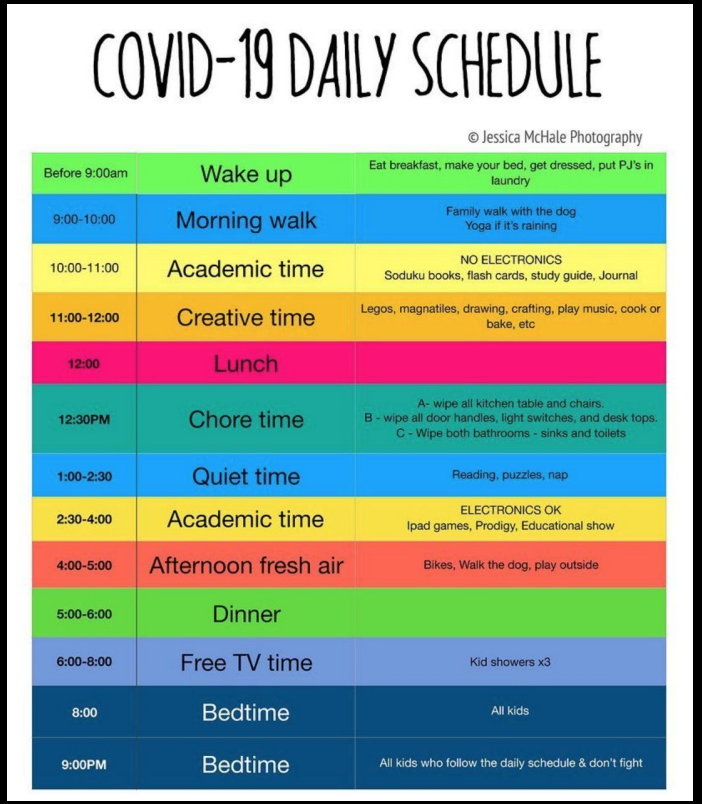
Examples for older students:







Sample schedules for kids home from school:

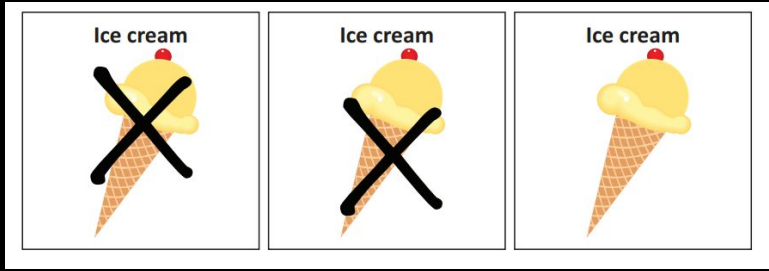


Set Parameters

- This involves using visuals to set clear boundaries around items or activities and to communicate basic expected behaviors, like waiting.
- Examples include physical boundaries, limited availability, and “wait”.

Physical Boundary examples:

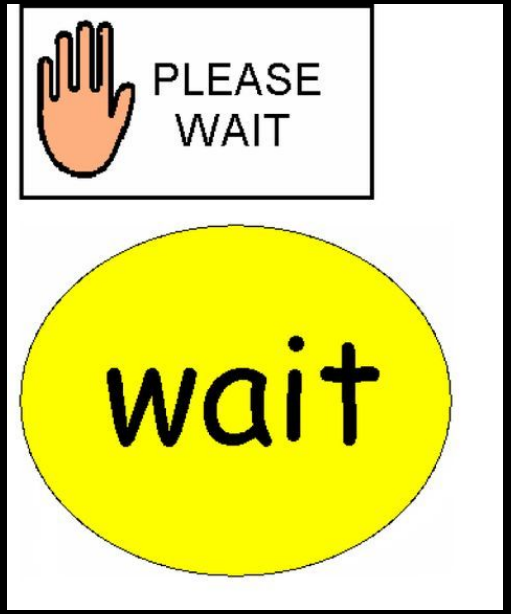
Limited Availability:

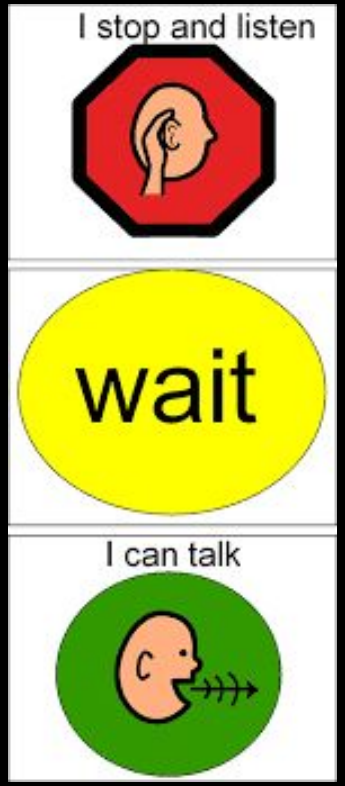


Tip

Decide the number of times or length of time that the item or activity is available. Indicate that through the visual, for example, 3 pictures of a juice box on the refrigerator to indicate that 3 juice boxes are allowed that day. After the item or activity has been used or done, cross out or remove one of the juice box pictures.

“Wait”





Tip

Begin by presenting the symbol “wait” for a very brief time before your child can have a preferred item or activity. It may help to pair the “wait” symbol with a timer. Have your child trade the “wait” card for the item or activity. For example, when your child asks for a snack, hand the “wait” card to your child, set the timer for 10 seconds, and then praise your child’s waiting and trade the snack for the “wait” card. As your child learns to use visuals for setting parameters, gradually increase the length of time or the number of situations in which your child is expected to wait.

Resources on Autism Spectrum Disorders:

- **Autism Speaks** provides resources and support for individuals with ASD and their families (www.autismspeaks.org/)
- **Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules (AFIRM)** designed to help you learn the step-by-step process of planning for, using, and monitoring an EBP with learning with ASD from birth to 22 years of age https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules
- Resources for Visual Supports