Midway ISD Special Education Department

Why Use Visual Schedules?

Visual schedules provide:

- Predictability, or reduced anxiety about upcoming events and expectations

- Clear direction adapted to the individual's communication/language skills

- A visual depiction of information that is commonly presented through auditory means

- A means through which to teach routine, as well as, flexibility

- Increased independence overall and generalization of skills to non-familiar settings

Schedules are used successfully to support typically-developing students and are particularly helpful to students who have difficulties with self-regulation, anxiety, and receptive language.

Schedules are considered an "established treatment" for individuals with autism spectrum disorders, according to the National Standards Project completed by the National Autism Center in 2009.

Schedules are a socially-acceptable support for people of all ages and abilities; thus, a schedule may be adapted for use throughout a person's life.

> "A schedule defends from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is a scaffolding on which a worker can stand and labor with both hands at sections of time." —Annie Dillard

Types of Visual Schedules: From Objects to Words

I. Functional object:
    Functional objects are used to represent portions of the student's day, as well as to be used by the student during those portions of the day

    Examples:
    *spoon= lunch
    *diaper= bathroom
    *token board= table time

II. Representational object:
    Tangible objects are used to represent (but not to be used actually during) portions of the student's day

    Examples:
    *plastic hamburger= lunch
    *toy tree= outside
    *miniature table= table time

III. Photograph:
    Photographs are used to represent portions of the student's day

    Examples:
    *photo of lunch tray= lunch
    *photo of jungle gym= outside
    *photo of student sitting at table= table time

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Types of Visual Schedules (continued)

IV. Picture/line drawing:
Cartoon pictures or 2-D drawings are used to represent portions of the student's day

Examples:
*BoardMaker picture of a student eating= lunch
*stick figure playing ball= outside
*icon of a student sitting at a desk= work time

V. Written:
Words or brief statements spell out portions of the student's day

Examples:
*"lunchtime"
*"reading groups"
*"independent desk work

VI. Combination:
Any combination of the above visual schedule types; a combination schedule is especially appropriate for students transitioning between two schedule types, such as photograph and icon.

Example:
A combination photograph and icon schedule might include a small photograph and a larger icon placed next to one another on a schedule strip (e.g., photo of the child eating snack and icon of a goldfish snack, both of which represent snack). Each time the student checked schedule, the teacher would make the connection between the two pictures (pointing, talking through, modeling a matching routine). The two visuals would continue to be posted next to one another until the student could successfully match the two and appeared to understand the meaning of the icon by itself, at which time, the student could transition entirely to an icon schedule.

"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." —Old Saying

Types of Visual Schedules: How to Choose

The type of visual schedule used with a particular student should be based upon his/her highest level of consistent understanding, transitioning gradually from basic to more complex schedule types as the student demonstrates increased comprehension/skills.

Ask yourself...

1. Does the student understand that photographs represent real things? If not, an object schedule, the most basic kind of visual schedule, is a good fit. If the student has trouble understanding that an object represents an activity (e.g., that a toy table represents work time), a functional object schedule, in which the objects are actually used during the time they represent on the schedule, is appropriate.

2. Does the student understand that photographs reflect real things? If so, does he understand the meaning of a general photograph of an object or activity OR does that photograph need to include the student him/herself and/or the actual objects involved in order for the student to understand what it means? If one of these scenarios fits, a photograph schedule is appropriate.

3. Does the student understand that cartoon pictures reflect real things? If yes, a picture/icon schedule is a good fit.

4. Does the student read and comprehend words? If yes, a written schedule, the most complex type of visual schedule, is appropriate.

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Variations of Visual Schedules: How to Make Them Special

Additional features of visual schedules may be customized to meet the student's needs with regard to everyday use, readability, and degree of assistance required to manipulate the schedule. Such characteristics should be considered in the context of the student's current levels of functioning and goals of long-term schedule use.

Consider...

1. Degree of Portability:
   Does the student need to carry the schedule from one location to another, or will it be used only in the classroom? Generally speaking, younger/ less developmentally mature students use a stationary schedule, while more advanced students use a portable schedule in a notebook or folder.

2. Layout:
   Does the student respond best to information presented in a left to right fashion, or top to bottom? A student's reading level often dictates this initially, whereas, convenience may dictate this as a student grows more advanced.

3. Length:
   Does the student respond best to seeing only small chunks of information at one time or being able to look ahead? Generally speaking, younger/ less developmentally mature students respond best to a half-day or partial-day schedule, while more advanced students respond well to a full-day, week-long, or other longer schedule that allows them to prepare well in advance, such as a personal planner.

4. Transition cue:
   Does the student need a cue from the teacher each time he/she is to check schedule? If so, providing a tangible/visual cue such as a tab of construction paper or "check schedule" picture reminder is helpful. As the child becomes more consistent, providing an auditory cue, such as saying, "Check schedule" or ringing a bell, communicates a schedule change to the student. For more advanced students, they may be entirely independent in checking their schedules and not require a special transition cue (outside of normal cues, like school bells or a watch).

5. "Finished" indicator:
   Does the student respond best to the "out of sight, out of mind" philosophy, such that a picture card should be placed in a "finished" envelope or turned over to its back when the task is completed, or is the student able to "check off" or "cross off" to indicate that an activity is complete? For the least developmentally mature students, providing a matching receptacle at the activity's location, at which they can place a picture card is helpful in maintaining their focus and ensuring they arrive in the correct place.

Visual Schedule Use: Putting Them to Work

Schedules may be adapted and personalized in a myriad of ways to meet an individual's needs. Making changes over time will be necessary to ensure that a particular type of schedule with particular variations is the best fit for a student!

1. Teach it!:
   Like any new skill, using a schedule must be taught explicitly and practiced with regular feedback/ reinforcement. For less developmentally mature students, repeated physical prompting and visual prompting (e.g., pointing) to help them "go through the motions" will be necessary; such prompting should be removed gradually. For more advanced students, a discussion about the use of a schedule (or writing out this information) followed by modeling and opportunities for practice and feedback is appropriate.

2. Reinforce it!:
   Making schedule use a positive experience is extremely important! A student's successfully checking his/her schedule should be recognized in a manner that is reinforcing to the student in order

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to increase the likelihood that the student will check his/her schedule again.

3. Maintain Consistency:
   Like an adult would become anxious or upset if he/she were to lose a personal electronic device, a student who is learning to use a schedule or has become accustomed to a schedule will rely on that schedule. Thus, ensuring that the schedule is updated appropriately and reflects any changes in routine is very important.

4. Encourage Flexibility:
   Use the schedule to communicate changes in routine to the student (e.g., a crossed out picture of music with a picture of art next to it might communicate that on Tuesday, the student is going to art instead of music). Reinforce the student's tolerance of such changes.

Examples of Visual Schedules

Type: representational object; portable, left-to-right, partial-day

Transition cue: object itself (teacher gives appropriate object to student each time he is to transition)

Type: combination, representational object with icon (transitioning child from object to icon); stationary, top-to-bottom, partial-day

Transition cue: object itself (teacher gives appropriate object to student each time he is to transition; student takes object to schedule and matches to icon, which tells him where to go next)

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Examples of Visual Schedules

Type: large photo with small word (student learning to read); portable, top-to-bottom, full-day

Transition cue (not shown): strip of paper (teacher gives student when time to check schedule; student places in cup next to schedule)

Type: combination, large icon with small words (student learning to read); stationary, left-to-right, partial-day

Transition cue: batman puzzle piece (teacher gives piece to student each time he needs to check schedule)

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Examples of Visual Schedules

Type: combination, large icon with small words (student learning to read); portable, top-to-bottom, full-day broken into small portions across multiple pages

Transition cue: marker (teacher gives marker to student each time she needs to check schedule)

"Finished" indicator: student checks off activity when finished

NOTE: work system or "mini schedule" (Dec, Jan, Nov…) embedded into big schedule

Type: icon; long-tern calendar depicting school days vs. home days

Transition cue: student automatically checks each morning at home

Examples of Visual Schedules

Tommy's Schedule Monday	All Done
Put backpack in cubby	
Independent Work	
Morning meeting	
Reading Time	
reading group	
spelling work at desk	
Music Class	
Speech	
Lunch	
Recess	
Special Reading Group	
Pack up backpack	
Go home	

Type: written; portable, top-to-bottom, full-day

Transition cue: teacher's voice (teacher reminds student to check schedule when finished with an activi-
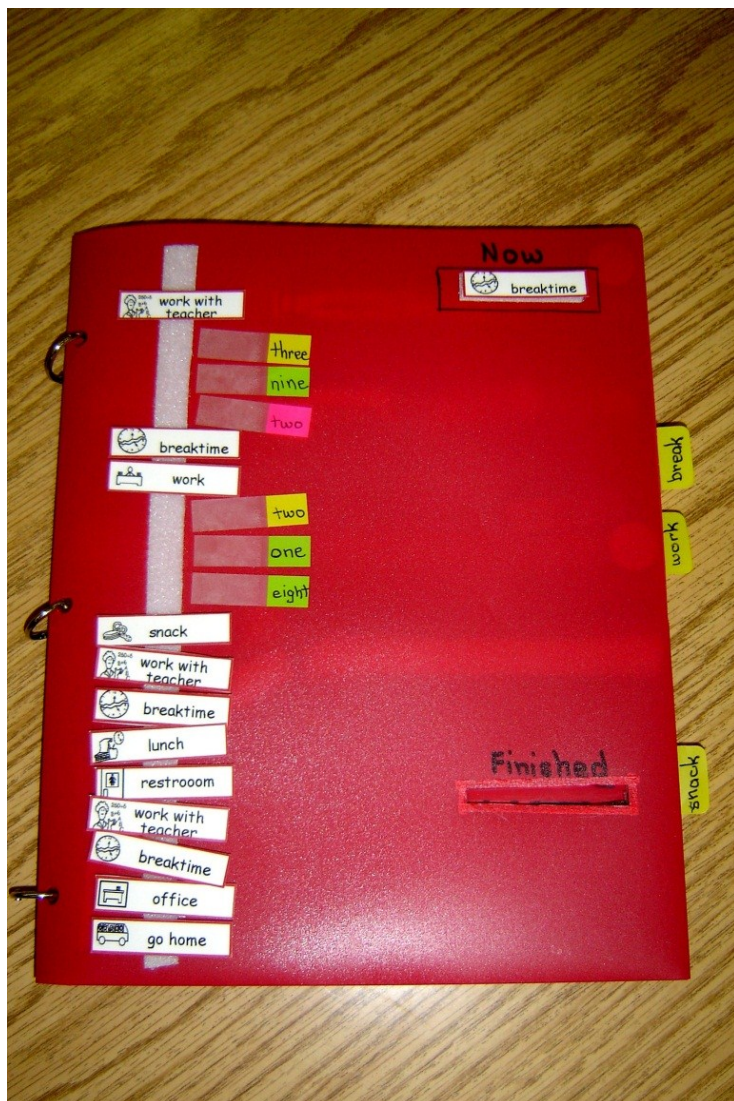
Type: large icon with small word (student learning to read); mini schedule depicting toileting sequence

Transition cue: teacher's voice (teacher reminds student to check schedule when entering the bathroom)

Using the Toilet

pants down | go potty
get toilet paper | wipe bottom
toilet paper in potty | flush potty
pants up | go wash hands

Examples of Visual Schedules

Type: combination, words with small icon (student reads, but benefits from picture cues); portable, top-to-bottom, full-day

Transition cue: student automatically checks schedule when finished with an activity

"Finished" indicator: student moves activity strip to "now" location before completing the activity; when finished, he places it in the "finished" slot (envelope inside binder)

NOTE: work system or "mini schedule" (three, nine, two…) embedded into big schedule; visual choice boards included behind tabs

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