

Inclusion Tools for After School Professionals

brought to you by the San Francisco Special Needs Inclusion/Mental Health Consultation Collaborative
The Special Needs Inclusion Project, Instituto Familiar de la Raza & Edgewood Center for Children and Families

SNIPPET #6: I See What You're Saying: Using Visual Supports

During your after school program, have you ever thought

I've told her three times already!

He's so disorganized!

He never pays attention!

She doesn't do well with changes!

All of these children could benefit from visual supports.

WHAT ARE VISUAL SUPPORTS

Visual supports are things that we see. They often give us information and help support communication. Think about these visual supports:

Body Language - crossed arms, stamping feet

Gestures – waving, blowing a kiss

Facial expression – frown, smile

Environmental Cues – thunderclouds, water boiling on the stove

Photos – catalogues, travel brochures, car brochures

Signs – street signs, restroom, information, first aid

Pictures – furniture assembly instructions, road maps

Text – recipes, reminder notes

Adults use visual supports all the time. Calendars, alarm clocks, shopping lists, to do lists, road maps and diaries are all examples of visual supports.

Visual supports can also be useful for children who:

- Are learning English
- Are easily distracted

- Follow the group and copy others
- Have difficulty attending to a speaker
- Have difficulty listening in busy environments
- Have difficulty remembering
- Don't like change or transitions
- Have language, hearing and other impairments

They can also be useful for other adults in the room, such as substitutes, volunteers, aides and paraprofessionals.

WHY USE VISUAL SUPPORTS

Research about communication shows us that communication is

56% - Visual

37% - Vocal (intensity and tone of voice, volume and speed of speech)

7% - Actual message or words

Spoken word can be transient and fleeting, once it has been said, it's gone! It can also be abstract, and worded differently each time you say it. For example, "it's packing up time" gives the same message, but sounds different to "time to clean up". Spoken word relies on the listener to be attending to you, and understand what you have said, and often to remember it later.

Visual supports can always be there so you can refer to them to remind yourself. Visual supports can also be easily recognizable, and are usually consistent and don't change, making it easier for you to learn and remember what they mean.

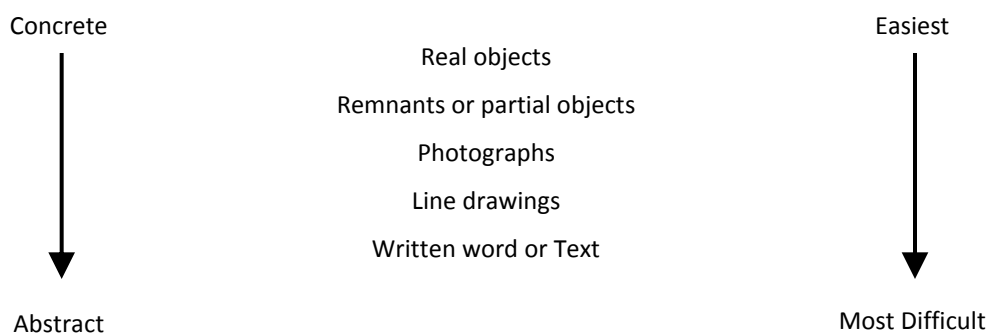
VISUAL SUPPORTS: GETTING STARTED

1. Decide what the visual support needs to do.

Visual supports can be used for many purposes and in many ways. Almost everything you say can be presented in a visual way. Sometimes you can give information visually in a way that's much easier than actually saying it. Think about what you want your visual support to do. Is it going to provide information? (about transitions, about where people are, about what's happening next), Is it going to give choices? Is it going to help organize? Is it going to help teach a new skill?

2. What does the child understand?

There are lots of types of visual supports you can use, including actual objects, pictures, photographs & text. Some are easier than others to recognize and understand.



3. Gather the visual supports.

Choose visuals that are appropriate to the children's level of understanding. When you choose a picture, try to make sure the image is clear and specific, so it is just the item you're talking about, not background information (eg: is it the computer, or the desk which has a computer on it, or the classroom?) Try to reduce the distraction in the background of the photo. If you have children in your group who are very literal, be careful about using photographs. Some children might only drink out of a red cup if that is what is in the photograph. It's a good idea to pair text with the picture to help develop children's literacy skills.

4. Make them durable.

There are lots of ways you can make the visuals durable. Think about using laminate, clear contact paper, tag board, kitchen magnets, magnet paper, index cards, packing tape, plastic sleeves, cardboard, poster boards or carpet squares. When thinking about how you will attach your pictures, try Velcro, Blu-tak or adhesive putty, magnets or pocket squares

5. Decide on the location and framework.

Planning out your visual support at the start will make using it a lot easier later.

- Think about who will be using the visual support. Will it be the whole group or an individual? Often, more than one child in the group will benefit from using it, and children will often use the pictures to communicate with each other.
- Does the visual schedule need to co-ordinate with times? How will you show this? Using times can be great for some children so they know exactly when things will happen. However, you will need to be prepared for when things don't happen on time, how will you explain this?

- Where will the visual support be placed? It's generally best to keep the visual support somewhere consistent so the children always know where to find it. If you need to have a visual support that is portable, how will you move it around? Where will it be displayed? Can you wear it on a lanyard? Or put it on a clipboard, in a binder, on the side of your program cart?
- How will you store extra pieces? Visual supports are much easier to use when you can find the picture you need, when you need them. Some good ideas for storage are envelopes, zip lock bags, binders with Velcro strips inside, recipe card boxes, takeout containers
- Will you use a 'finish' envelope, pouch or box? These can help children understand when something is completed, and assist in transitions.
- How big does it need to be? It will need to be big enough that you can put everything you need on it; in a way that everyone can see it. However, it also needs to be small enough to manage, move and store.

7. Decide how you will use it

Think about what your routine will be when using the visual support. Try to keep it as consistent as possible so that children can learn it. When you are using the visual support, make sure you have the children's attention first. Show them the image and pair it with the verbal information, telling them clearly what it is or what is happening.

8. Use it!

For a visual support to be beneficial, you actually need to use it! You need to follow it, and show the children that you are following it. Refer back to it regularly during the day or the activity. If you're not following it – change it!

OTHER RESOURCES

Visual Strategies Information

www.usevisualstrategies.com

<http://www.disabilitysolutions.org/newsletters/files/five/5-5.pdf>

<http://www.disabilitysolutions.org/newsletters/files/five/5-4.pdf>

Free On-line Pictures

www.do2learn.com

www.usevisualstrategies.com/AutismVisualPrintablePictures.aspx

www.sparklebox.co.uk

<http://www.setbc.org/pictureSET/Default.aspx>

www.pdictionary.com

www.freeclipartnow.com

Submitted by Lauren Crook, TA Coordinator

Special Needs Inclusion Project, Support for Families

1663 Mission Street, 7th Floor

San Francisco, CA 94103

lcrook@snipsf.org