

USING VISUAL SCHEDULES

What is a visual schedule?



A visual schedule is a visual list of activities that tells the order in which the activities will occur. Using a visual schedule creates a positive routine, allowing the user to look to their schedule to know what to expect throughout their day. Often times, individuals with autism have an expectation that the day will occur exactly as it did

the day before, and may have difficulty when the schedule changes. Or, they may set their own agenda and overlook or have difficulty accepting the activities that others have planned for them. Schedules solve both of these problems because the individual relies on the schedule, rather than their own expectations, to tell them what will happen. Schedules also allow an individual to have a system to help them move from one activity to another independently, rather than relying on someone else to prompt them.

What are the advantages of using a visual schedule?

- Visual schedules use the individual with autism's visual strengths to increase their understanding of what will happen.
- By promoting increased understanding, visual schedules reduce resistance and behavior problems.
- Visual schedules help the individual tolerate changes and increase flexibility.
- Visual schedules promote independence and self-sufficiency.
- Visual schedules can help structure time for special interests.



HOW TO SET UP A VISUAL SCHEDULE.

1. *Decide on the format of the schedule.*

Choose a format that your child will easily understand. Do not be concerned about choosing a schedule that is “below” your child’s skills (e.g. using a picture schedule even though your child can read). You want your child to be able to use it easily, and to be able to use it even when they are upset or distressed. Never use a schedule format that your child has not mastered (for example, don’t use a picture schedule if your child does not consistently look at, match, and recognize a variety of pictures).

Object Schedules

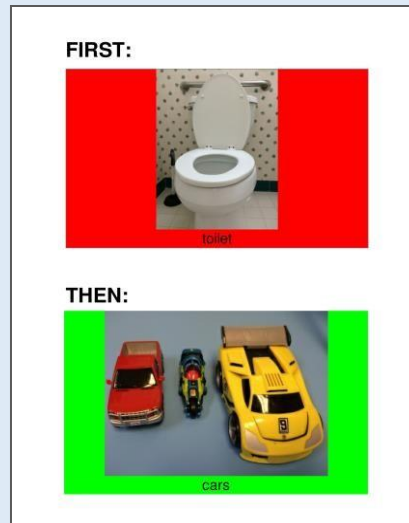
These are most appropriate for individuals who have fewer language skills. They can be used for very young children up to adults. The simplest way to use an object schedule is for the parent to hand an object to their son or daughter just before they are about to move to the next activity. The individual then takes the object and uses it in the next activity. Start by making a list of which objects you are going to use to represent each activity your child does.

For example:

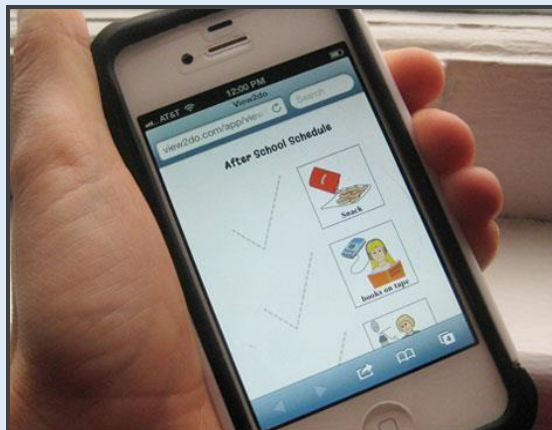
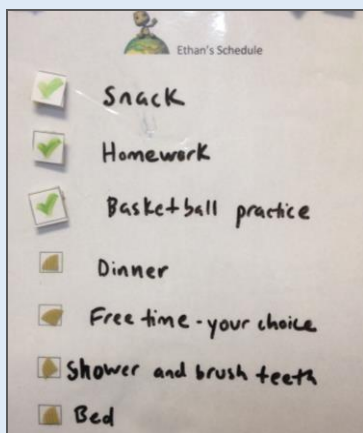
- Eat – plate
- Bathroom – empty toilet paper roll
- Car – keys
- School – book bag
- TV – remote control
- Naptime – book
- Get dressed – socks
- Swimming – bathing suit
- Play – toy car



Picture or Photograph Schedules. If your child attends to photos or pictures in books or magazines, and can consistently match pictures or photos, they may be ready for a picture-based schedule. Some people respond better to actual photographs of the activity, whereas others may prefer computerized depictions. Below is an example of a picture and a photograph schedule.



Written Schedules. Written schedules are used for children who are fluent readers. If your son or daughter is beginning to recognize words, you can start with adding words to his or her picture schedule. Some individuals respond well to schedules that are located on an electronic device. Below is an example of a hand written and electronic schedule.



2. *Decide on the length of the schedule.*

The length of a schedule will depend on your son or daughter's needs and abilities. Beginning learners start with being handed an object or photograph representing the next activity. Once they understand this process, you can begin to introduce a "First-then" schedule that shows a sequence of two activities. Some individuals benefit from always using a First-then schedule, while others may be able handle more information, incorporating three, four, or a whole day's worth of activities. Observe your child and notice the number of items he or she can handle at one time.



3. *Decide how your child will track progress using the schedule.*

There are a number of different ways a child can mark off activities as he or she works through a schedule. Marking off the activity helps the child know where they are and see that they are making progress through the schedule. For younger children, it is often helpful to start by having the child remove the item from his or her schedule as an activity is completed so that there is a clear representation that the activity is finished. Sometimes the removed item is put in a "finished" area near their schedule, such as a basket or pocket at the bottom of the schedule. There are other variations such as turning

over each picture of a picture schedule when the activity is complete or moving it from the "to do" side (left side) of the page to the "finished" side (right side) of the page. For written schedules, students can cross a line through

activities as they have finished them or put a check in a checkbox.

Lucas' Schedule	
8:15	Homeroom
9:00	Math
9:30	Work with <u>Mrs. Jones in room 213</u>
9:50	Writers' workshop
10:30	Reading



Some individuals benefit from carrying the object or picture to the location they are moving to, and matching it with Velcro to a similar object or picture. This is helpful for children who do not transition independently because they get distracted or forget where their schedule told them to go.



4. *Decide on the cue you are going to use to get your son or daughter to check their schedule.*

The simplest cue is to place the object representing the next activity into the person's hand. In this case, the schedule is *brought to the individual*. When a child is able to travel independently to their schedule to check it, one of the best methods to use it to give them a visual cue to "check schedule." Using a visual cue removes language demands that may not be processed well, especially if your child is highly anxious or having a behavioral challenge. A visual cue also helps a child who may be distracted and who may have forgotten they were supposed to check their schedule. Examples of visual cues are a picture that a child matches to a similar image on their schedule, or to a pencil the child uses to check off their schedule. If your son or daughter is using an electronic device, they can set an alarm on their watch or organizer that reminds them to check their schedule at key times.



4. *Teach your child to use his or her schedule.*

Like any new concept, using a schedule is something that you need to teach your son or daughter. For an individual with little or low verbal understanding, you can do this by placing the object or picture in their hand and gently physically guiding them (from behind) to go to the desired area.

For individuals with more verbal skills, you can explain (briefly) the concept of schedules, and then shows them how to use their schedule, either by guiding them or modeling using the schedule yourself. For very bright children, you might also choose to show them the scheduling system you use in your own life, to help them understand why it is important to use a schedule, and to help them accept using it.

5. *Be consistent and modify as needed.* Incorporating the schedule into a regular routine will help your child develop more independence with it and will maximize its benefits. Your child will quickly learn to trust the schedule, and will be more able to handle changes in their schedule. Having your child experience the benefits of keeping a schedule when they are young, you are paving the way for them to use one as they grow. This will become important as they need to become increasingly organized and independent.

What are considerations to keep in mind when using a visual schedule?

- Some visual schedules can take time to create and maintain. Typically, the work put in up front saves time in the end dealing with behavior problems and prompting your son or daughter through activities.
- You may need to make modifications along the way. If the schedule does not seem to be working, this typically means that it needs to be adjusted, not that schedules are ineffective or unnecessary for your child.
- Visual schedules do not need to be perfect, computer printed, and laminated. Many children respond to handwritten schedules with hand drawn pictures.
- If your child is not interested in his schedule, consider incorporating a special interest, a reward system (for older children who understand cause and effect), or changing it if the schedule is confusing or unappealing in some way.
- Your child may or may not need a schedule all the time. Consider using it during times of the day when your child seems to have difficulty following directions, being independent, or is consistently anxious about what will happen.
- As you child grows and learns new skills, the format of the schedule will grow with him.