INFORMATION SHEET

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Project ACCESS: Supporting Missouri Autism Educators

VISUAL SUPPORTS

Children with autism tend to learn best when visual supports are used rather than auditory input. Seeing it, rather than hearing it, can help the child process and retain information better. Visual supports are an evidence-based intervention and 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 (i.e. visual timers)
- Maps or timelines

Visual supports can be used to:

- Create daily or weekly schedules and special event schedules
- Task schedules (steps of brushing teeth, getting ready for school, or completing chores etc.)
- Support communication with children who are less or non-verbal
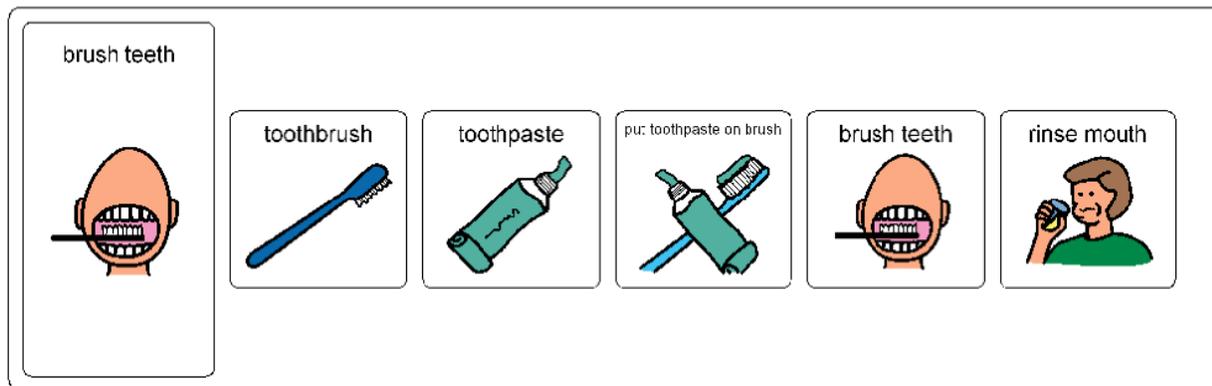- Offer choices (board of choices for free time, reinforcement, or needs/wants)

When using visual supports, you want to remember the order in which to use them. Start with having the child match object to object first, then object to picture, and next picture to picture. This allows the child to understand that a picture can represent an object. If you start with picture to picture first and a child doesn't understand the concept of a picture can represent an object, the child could have a difficult time understanding what the picture represents or what they are supposed to do.
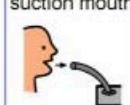
Sequence for using visual supports:

- Object
- Color photos
- Black and white photos
- Color drawings
- Black and white drawings
- Written word

Programs that generate visual can be expensive, an alternative to buying a program is to make your own visual supports. You can take photos with your phone or digital camera, print off pictures from the internet, or look at local stores for visual such as dollar tree, Walmart, Target to name a few. A note of caution when taking photos, make sure the background isn't too busy as it can take away from the main focus. Another option is downloading an App that offers visual supports on an iPhone, iPad, or other device.
Here are a few examples of visual supports that could be used at home:
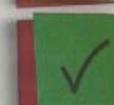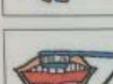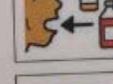
Today's Visit to the Dentist Office

1 hang up coat

2 waiting room

3 sit in dentist chair

4 put on sunglasses

5 open wide

6 count teeth 1...2...3

7 brush teeth

8 suction mouth

9 floss teeth

10 Finished! Pick a prize!

OK | Good | I need a break | stop STOP

Morning Routine

6:15 am Wake Up	✓	
6:20 am Feed & Water Dog	✓	
6:25 am Make Bed	✓	
6:30 am Brush Teeth/ Wash Face		
6:35 am Brush Hair		
6:40 am Get Dressed		
7:00 am Take Medication		
7:10-7:20 am Get on Bus		

A few things to remember when using visual supports:

1) It is okay to use written words with all other forms of visual supports. You never know when a child will start understanding written language, exposure can help build that skill.
2) Once a child makes progress with visual supports you don't want to take them away. As typically developing adults we use planners, calendars, sticky notes, and phones to keep our schedule or provide reminders. It is okay to adapt visual supports as the child ages to something more appropriate but you don't want to just take them away as they still need the support. Also, just because a person with autism is highly verbal or intelligent, it doesn't mean they don't need visuals to help them navigate