

Making and Using Visual Supports Transcript
University of Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

00:16

I couldn't believe that Eric hooked into the picture thing at three. And thinking back he probably could have done it at two. I think it's the best thing because I really think we prevented a lot of behavior problems with Eric because when he was three we noticed he was starting to get very anxious, I couldn't leave the room without him getting anxious and crying or making sounds so I knew he was getting uptight that I was leaving.

00:44

He'd cling to my leg, he would just hang onto me he was just so terrified of what was going to happen next. It brought me more awareness of visual cues that Eric was picking up from his environment.

00:58

It was amazing because I didn't realize that when I put my purse on my shoulder or started looking around the house for my keys that he was getting anxious because he thought I was leaving or we were going somewhere. It was the best thing that happened to Eric because I really think that it brought to him a world of communication I don't think he would have gotten as far as he has today without it.

1:23

Communication is a common problem in children who have autism and related disabilities. They often have difficulty in understanding spoken communication from others. Because of this they have problems knowing what is or isn't happening during their day, and why changes occur in their routine. They may have difficulty switching from one activity to the next, and understanding why they cannot do something they want to do at a particular time.

1:49

For a child with disabilities, even the simplest directions can come and go too quickly for them to process and understand. A visual support can really help them understand the message. Many children with disabilities have strong visual skills, and these strengths can be capitalized on with visual supports.

2:13

Visual communication tools such as objects, photographs, picture symbols, daily schedules, and choice boards can provide the support necessary to greatly improve a child's understanding and ability to communicate, helping children to be more active, independent, and successful participants in their lives.

2:32

Eric was about, umm, two and a half, three, I think he was three and we started using the visual supports when CARD came and introduced them to Eric, umm, it was pretty new we had no idea what it was all about and everything was explained to us and umm we started implementing them in our home.

3:00

We used photographs, actual photographs of things and also, umm, things that we didn't take picture of was like food, like we cut out, umm, cardboard little squares of what the food box was: cereal or goldfish, or crackers or something like that so that it was an actual picture of whatever it was and um, we put them on a mat, they had velcro on the back, that's how we basically started.

Where to Begin

3:38

First you need to decide what the visual supports need to do . They can provide choices for foods or activities, they can be used to create a schedule or help complete a task involving lots of steps. Next you need to decide what your child understands. When creating visual supports keep in mind that you don't want your child to struggle to understand what the individual pictures mean. You don't put your appointments on your calendar in another language so don't use visual supports that are difficult for your child to interpret.

4:10

Abstract images can be hard for some children to understand, so you may need to use a photograph at first instead

of a picture symbol. Using colored or larger sized symbols can also help you child understand more easily. You can also add words to the pictures or symbols to help teach them to your child but remember to put the exact word on the symbol that you use with your child. If you ask your child if he needs to go potty don't put toilet or bathroom on the picture symbol, put potty.

4:42

Eric progressed, um so well with the visual supports I mean, um he went from actual photographs of things to um, his speech therapist started introducing at the age of four, um computer images, symbolic images of, you know what we were asking of, and he transitioned so quickly into that that you know, I was surprised I didn't think he would take off actual pictures to symbols and you know once we used it once he was able to use you know the second time and he just carried on from there.

5:15

No matter what type of visual support you use, make certain that it is easily identifiable to your child. Make sure that a photograph focuses on one and only one thing, don't take a picture of the entire desk if the object you need is the computer. Make sure things aren't blurry, too dark, or hidden by the flash. Also beware of possible shadows caused by bubbles in the laminating paper you might use.

5:46

These visual supports will be handles a lot so make them durable. Paste photographs to poster board or some other backing material. Laminate symbols with clear contact paper. Attach velcro or magnets to the back for easy use.

6:04

Last decide where the visual supports should be located. Put food choices on the refrigerator. Pick a good central location in the house for a daily schedule, maybe on a wall in the kitchen or living room.

If your child moves around a lot, playing inside and outside, you may want to create a portable schedule out of a photo album or three ring notebook that she can take with her.

6:29

It's a good idea to use a 'stop' pocket or box with a picture schedule. This is a place like a basket or an envelop where your child can put the symbol at the end of each activity. It can also double as a way for your child to say he would like to stopping doing an activity. Another opt is to have your child simply turn the pictures over as each activity is finished.

You will also want to have a 'no choice' symbol for use when a food or activity is unavailable as a choice.

6:59

I think what our main was was when Eric was three, um her really didn't have, I guess, any incentive to make choices, or um really understand that he could pick and choose things, I think he was very passive and took whatever I gave him to eat and for snacks and he never, he wasn't verbal at all so he never really let us know what he wanted or where he wanted to go or anything like that and um, it was important, we were told it was important that he start making choices because this would be you know, progress for communication so we started using them just to show him that a picture does correlate with an object like food or going outside or swimming or something like that so that's how we initially started then we started doing it as if he has a choice, in other word did he want cracker or did he want fruit for a snack.

8:07

And for the first while, for him it was "what are you doing with these pictures" and to be honest with you I was a bit skeptical because I thought "this isn't going to work, this is just too simple, it's not going to work" and um, one day it just happened to click. He, um, was sitting at the table for snack, we gave him two pictures, I think it was goldfish or fruit I don't remember and um, he sat there and he I don't know if he just glanced at one picture or stared at it longer than the other or, I don't think he pointed, um and we jumped up and said "oh ok you want this" and we ran to the cupboard and it was the funniest thing because it dawned on him that he actually had a choice.

8:55

So he almost made a game out of it he was giggling and laughing and was pointing at another picture, so we jumped up and go that and ran back. I think he went through about three or four pictures, he was laughing

hysterically, and it was almost like a light went on and he realized "hey I can actually have a choice in what I want to eat."

9:13

A choice board or menu is one of the simplest forms of visual supports to begin using. They can come in all sizes and formats depending on the kind and number of choices. You could keep a choice board right on your refrigerator door for snack time, it can tell your child the various food or drink choices available to him.

9:35

This helps your child learn how to communicate by requests using picture symbols and is a good way to provide immediate reinforcement. When starting out it is best to limit the choices to just a few items at any given time. Keep it simple, always start small then expand as needed.

9:52

Later as your child is learning to use the pictures, he may have a whole book of choices. Also, always try to reinforce your child when he uses the visual supports. For example, granting his request for an extra bath when he brings you the symbol will help him understand that he can communicate with the visual supports.

10:13

Well that was the most amazing thing because um, when he was three he didn't speak words at all, I mean he never used communication it was more for self-stimulation if anything, it was never an appropriate use of words to ask for things or to express himself or anything like that, so when we started giving him choices on the foods and activities that he could do, um I think we were doing it for about a couple of months and one day, it was a Saturday morning, and he just walked up to our board that we had all his pictures for activities and food on tis board, um, he just pulled off a picture of our play set outside and he walked right up to me, handed me the picture and said "outside" and I mean

11:00

I almost fainted because you know it was out of the blue and um, he just started almost, like it took the pressure off him to speak when he handed me the picture and it just became automatic to say the word for the picture. And um, after that he would start saying a word and then run to the board and pick up the picture, I mean it was wonderful because you realize he was really trying to communicate with us and he was able to use words, it was amazing.

11:28

A daily schedule shows the major events in your child's day. Once again keep it simple. It is best to include only the major portions of the day. Otherwise the schedule might get too long and difficult for a child to follow successfully. This type of clear, simple support provided ahead of time can help a child predict what is going to happen in the future, it also helps her understand when there is a change in the routine so she can adapt and become more flexible.

Now that you have made the schedule it is important to use it consistently making it part of the child's daily routine.

12:05

The schedule should be used to preview what is going to happen throughout your child's day and referred back to during each transition. In order for the schedule to be useful, it is important to have some way of indicating that an activity has ended. This can be done by either turning the picture over, or placing it in a stop or finished pocket. If your child wanders away from an activity, you can also use the schedule to guide the child back.

12:33

When you first begin using the schedule, you probably need to perform the steps yourself. This is called 'modeling.' It allows your child to learn how to use the schedule by first watching you. However, as soon as possible, your child needs to actively participate in the process. For example, when you are first reviewing the schedule in the mornings you may need to put it together yourself. But soon, your child might take part by placing each picture on the board as you hand it to him.

13:05

I think the pictures helped him realize that communication even if it's the pictures or I think the words meant something. I don't think that he realized that it meant anything, I think he thought that it was just for his own

enjoyment to make noises and you know we were just mattering at him I don't think he even realized we were asking anything of him and the pictures just seemed to bring it together that not only can we tell him, but he can tell us, and I think that was the biggest milestone in his communication skills.

13:37

Mini-schedules are useful in targeting certain events or tasks in a daily schedule where a child has difficulty. It breaks a larger task down into smaller steps which are easier for a child to handle.

13:51

If your child does well following a schedule for the rest of the day but at bedtime he often forgets parts of his routine, a mini-schedule might be a good solution. It breaks down the larger tasks of getting ready for bed into simple steps so they are easier for him to follow. Another reason for using the mini schedule is if different people put him to bed. It can ensure that everyone has your child follow the same sequence of steps.

14:18

Mini schedules can be used for going to the bathroom, morning and nighttime routines, and getting ready for school, among other things.

14:27

Remember when you start using visual supports whether with choice boards or schedules it is important to remember these key things: Start small, Expand as needed, Use it consistently, and reinforce your child when he uses the visual supports.

14:55

You know, I did initially think that, I thought that um, that it would inhibit his speech because it is just so much easier to pull a picture off a board than to actually um, form words and you know, try to communicate with us verbally. And he, that never was the case, if anything it enhanced his word vocabulary I mean he was more interested, you know after a couple of months he started grabbing books and pointing at things and looking at me to tell him what it was, and you know we just started broadening the picture board that he had for choices and um activities and things and his vocabulary increased more and more.

15:35

So i didn't find that at first it inhibited anything. I think it's made him a happier boy, um, I think he's far more productive in his day because he feels that we are communicating with him back, and his sense of security is so much better than it was when he was younger.

