



Visual Schedules Can Help Students Succeed This School Year

It is back-to-school season! Whether your children are going back to an in-school, traditional educational model, are learning remotely or are doing a hybrid model of both online and in-person, it can be a challenge getting kids back into the swing of things. This can be especially true for students with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and/or other medical or behavioral challenges as it is harder for them to change, add, alter or deter from their "normal" routine.

Juli Augustin, the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst supervisor at ABA Behavioral Specialists, suggests implementing visual schedules to help children who may be struggling with a new routine, such as the return to school this fall (or other daily tasks and challenges).

"A visual schedule adds routine and structure to the day in a way that is easy for kids to see and understand," Augustin said. "It sets expectations, which is really important. A visual schedule puts a beginning and an end to a task or to the day so they can understand what to expect and when."

The Why Behind a Visual Schedule

Nearly 80% of all learning done by children happens visually. For children on the autism spectrum or who have attention deficits, hyperactivity, learning disabilities or other behavior challenges, that number can be even larger. A visual schedule helps to effectively communicate the order of upcoming activities or events that the child must accomplish through the use of visual cues, whether it be icons, pictures, objects, photographs, words or a combination of tangible supports.

With a visual schedule, a child can see where he or she is supposed to be and at what time. Even if the child doesn't understand times, it gives them an understanding of sequence and they can determine when an activity needs to be done.

A number of special needs students have trouble processing verbal commands or information. By replacing verbal commands with visual cues, students will learn to complete tasks without the help of an adult, teacher or therapist, which is the ultimate goal of applied behavioral analysis (ABA) therapy.

Additionally, visual schedules have been shown to help reduce anxiety in students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They find comfort in having a routine that they see and understand. They can also feel anxious if they don't understand prompts from a teacher or adult and may feel more comfortable when they see visual cues instead. The visual provides security, expectations and structure and can be physiologically calming, which can reduce outbursts or break downs.

Therefore, visual schedules provide much-needed routine and structure for special needs individuals. They assist with their comprehension of tasks, ease the learning process and are easy to view should a student need to be reminded of the day's events. For visual schedules to be most effective, they need to be modified per each individual's learning needs, so they may vary in length and form. They can be implemented for a certain task, like washing hands (turn on water, squirt soap, rub hands together under water, etc.) or for a full day (brush teeth, get dressed, have breakfast, put on backpack and wait for school bus, etc.).



"A main concern for kids with autism or a behavioral challenge is that routine is necessary," Augustin said. "Unstructured time is really hard for them. Visual schedules establish that structure and routine, and they can see it, which makes a huge difference."

Implementing a Visual Schedule

Often visual schedules will be suggested by a therapist, but they do not have to be. They can be implemented in school by teachers or in the home environment by parents. They are often implemented when a child seems to be craving more structure or they begin acting out because of confusion, frustration or lack of routine.

The most important thing to remember when looking to implement a visual schedule is that it must be formatted and designed to the individual needs of the student. Before constructing the schedule, assess the comprehension level, attention span, sequencing abilities and other skills of the child.

The schedules can look different from each student to each family or each person, but they will all function similarly. They can be made using a laminated board and washable markers or a felt board with adhesive icons that can be physically removed when an activity is complete. Keep them functional, reusable and eye-catching for the best results. The goal is to have the child or student want to engage with and interact with the visual schedule, so make it fun and interactive. Another important aspect of using a visual schedule is rewarding the child for a job well done. Add a highly sought-after reward to the end of the visual schedule so they are working toward that ultimate goal. You can find some great examples of visual schedules here

(<https://especialleducation.com/5-types-visual-schedules-help-students-succeed/>).

Do You Need More Help

Visual schedules are a great tool for aiding a child's learning abilities and helping them achieve independence. Whether you need to start by breaking down a simple task into visual cues and work your way up to full-day schedules or start with icons and simple images and work up to including times and words into the visual schedule, you are doing it right! That is because visual schedules are all different and specifically tailored to the needs of the individual. Do your best!

"For those we work with, our goal is to work them out of ABA therapy, to work ourselves out of our job!" Augustin said. "We want to see our kids succeed and become independent to the point that they no longer need ABA therapy, and a visual schedule is a great tool to help us help them gain that independence."

If you need more help, please reach out to ABA Behavioral Specialists at 330-842-7118 or visit ababehavioralspecialists.com. Most insurance companies cover ABA therapy for children diagnosed with ASD.