Module: Visual Supports

Steps for Implementation: Visual Supports

Hume, K., & Smith, S. (2009). *Steps for implementation: Visual supports.* Chapel Hill, NC: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, The University of North Carolina.

This document includes steps for implementation for several visual supports including labels, locators, and visuals across the curriculum. To access step-by-step instructions for visual schedules or visual boundaries, please see the related *Steps for Implementation: Visual Schedule*s or *Steps for Implementation: Visual Boundaries* in this module.

Step 1. Developing Visual Supports for Individual Learners

1. Teachers/practitioners determine WHAT information should be presented visually for the learner (e.g., upcoming events, location of specific materials, an academic concept).

This may include providing information about an upcoming event, the location of people or classroom materials, or an academic concept. Staff should consider the following questions when determining what activities, events, or concepts may require the use of a visual support:

- Does the activity, event, or concept cause frustration for the learner?
- Does the activity, event, or concept cause anxiety for the learner?
- Is a great deal of adult support required for the learner to be successful with the activity, event, or concept?
- Is the activity, event, or concept difficult for the learner to understand when only verbal information is provided?

If staff answer yes to any of these questions after assessing the situation, it is likely that the learner would benefit from a visual support.

Once the activity, event, or concept is identified, teachers/practitioners assess the learner's skills to ensure that the appropriate visual support is developed.

2. After selecting the information to be presented visually, teachers/practitioners conduct individualized assessments of learners' comprehension skills to select one of the following **forms of representation**:

    a. *objects* (e.g., when cleaning up art supplies, an object such as a pair of scissors, an empty glue bottle, or a crayon would be attached to the outside of the container),
    b. *photographs* (e.g., a photo of the speech therapist is placed on the calendar on days when therapy is to occur),
    c. *drawing or picture symbols* (e.g., drawings of a home and a school as well as each student in the classroom can let learners know where peers are on a particular day),
    d. *words* (e.g., one-word written prompts like "Name", "Sees...", "Does…", "Hears…", can be used along with graphics to prompt description of a book character),

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e. *phrases or sentences* (e.g., written phrases such as “Incoming mail goes here” and “Attendance records go here” to help learner complete tasks), or
f. combination of the above formats.

Step 2. Organizing Visual Supports for Individual Learners

In Step 2, teachers/practitioners organize the visual supports and related elements for the learner.

1. Teachers/practitioners ensure that all visual supports are gathered and arranged prior to activity/event (e.g., classroom locators/labels are properly positioned, calendars are in place, curriculum supports are paired with academic materials).

Step 3. Implementing Visual Supports for Individual Learners

1. Teachers/practitioners show the learner the visual support (e.g., locator, label, technology support).

2. Teachers/practitioners teach the learner how to use visual supports by:

   a. showing the learner the visual support (e.g., a graphic organizer, locator, label, technology support);
   b. standing behind the learner when prompting use of visual support (to ensure learner is looking at visual information, not the staff member);
   c. using only relevant language while teaching use of visual support (e.g. “Today you have speech” rather than “Today is Thursday, Liz, and this picture of the speech therapist means you have speech today”);
   d. assisting the learner in participating in activity/event with visual support (e.g., putting items away in labeled containers, completing activity with technology support); and
   e. fading prompts as quickly as possible.

3. Once the learner has learned how to use the visual support, teachers’/practitioners’ prompts are minimal during support use.

4. Teachers/practitioners use visual supports consistently throughout the day.

5. Teachers/practitioners prepare the learner for changes in activity/event that requires use of visual support (e.g., if speech therapy or field trip is cancelled, if technology is not working correctly).

6. Visual supports move with the learner across settings OR visual supports are located across settings.

7. Teachers/practitioners use a data collection system to record how learners use visual supports. *Level of independence during use should be noted, as well as how learners have progressed through the various forms/types of visual supports throughout the year.*