

Individual Picture Schedules



Most people rely on a variety of visual cues – such as street signs, day timers, and posted reminders - to get to where they need to be on time and follow the routines and expectations in a variety of settings. For individuals with disabilities, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorders, visual supports may be especially important. The natural cues available in the environment may not be sufficient – individualized visual supports may be needed.

Picture schedules are a frequently used and powerful example of these supports. An individual picture schedule reminds a child with autism what the sequence of events is going to be, when preferred activities will occur, when breaks will be available, etc. Using a schedule also allows the adults to alert the child to any changes in the usual routine. By reducing anxiety and increasing predictability, the schedule helps promote engagement and appropriate behavior.

Picture schedules take a variety of forms.

A simple “First-Then” system, which depicts just the current activity and the next one that will occur, can be a good introduction to a schedule system. (The “first-then” approach can also be used for particular tasks or activities in conjunction with other systems).



Other schedules display the sequence of events for part or all of the day. The schedule may be posted in the classroom, kept at the child’s desk, or carried throughout the day by the child, depending on need and preference, but should be easily accessible for the student to refer to throughout the day.

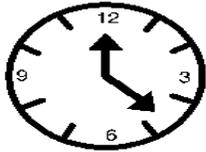
Effective Visual Schedules have:

- Activities/items depicted visually (real objects, photographs, picture symbols, etc). Chose the representation that you think will be most accessible to the student, but don’t worry if he or she doesn’t understand all the symbols at first. Always pair graphics with text to build literacy.
- A clear progression, either left-to-right or top-to-bottom
- An way to show that an activity is complete (e.g., moving items to a “finished” folder, checking things off with a dry-erase marker)
- The flexibility to indicate changes to the normal routine. Be sure to have symbols for infrequent events like fire drills, assemblies, etc. available.

After designing and creating a schedule that includes these components, the next step is to introduce it to the student and teach him or her to use it. While some students may immediately grasp how the system works, most will need modeling, prompting, and reinforcement to learn to use their schedules effectively.



Introduce the schedule to the child through modeling. Before an activity begins, show the child the symbol. As the activity finishes, move it to the “finished” folder . Point to the next activity.



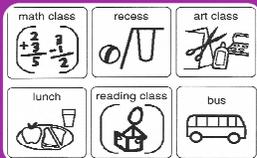
As the student becomes familiar with schedule, use wait time, gestures, or other prompts to encourage him or her to check and manage it.



Reinforce the student for using the schedule. Over time, using the schedule will become self-reinforcing, but praise, tokens, etc. help in the beginning!



Use as a few verbal prompts as possible – they don't promote independence and are hard to fade. A visual reminder to “check your schedule” can be placed on the student's desk or shown at key times.



If the student asks when an activity will occur or appears unsure about where to go or what to do, prompt him or her to check the schedule.



In addition to the daily schedule, consider using within task schedules for longer activities (e.g., a list of the things that will occur during “reading” or “PE” that can be checked off as they are finished.)



Over time, the schedule may change form (e.g., become smaller or more text-based) but won't be taken away. Visual schedules are an appropriate assistive device for people of all ages and skill levels.