

Tip Sheets

Using Visual Supports with Infants and Toddlers

Using Visual Supports

Visual schedules involve using pictures or objects to represent what is going to happen next. By using visual supports, you can help children learn to understand and anticipate the future. A visual schedule can also be used to teach children how to complete a task that has a series of many steps.

It can be helpful to introduce visual schedules to very young children, such as toddlers, in its simplest form, the First-Then Board.

The First-Then Board

The First-Then Board is a visual schedule that displays only the next two things that are going to happen. For example:

1. First read a story,
2. Then eat snack.

For infants the actual object can be shown to the child. For example, show the child a spoon when it is time to eat. Actual objects and real-life photographs are the most appropriate visuals to use with infants and toddlers.

Selecting Appropriate Visuals

When choosing visual supports, it is very important to consider the level of visuals to be used. The highest level of visual that a child is able to understand should be selected. The following are some important questions to consider when selecting appropriate visuals:

- If the child is nonverbal, is the child able to reach for or point to objects?
- Does the child recognize people and items in photographs?
- Does the child recognize pictures in books (point to when named)?

Using Labels

Early care and education professionals planning to use labels as visual supports with infants and toddlers should consider the following:

- Label each child's cubby or basket for personal belongings with a picture of the child's face and name.
 - At the beginning of the year or when a new child enters the program the photo should be larger than the text of the name.
 - The first letter of the child's name should be upper case and the other letters lower case.

- As children progress in their development and become preschoolers, increase the size of the text and decrease the size of the photo.
- Use labels to show older children where materials can be kept or found.
 - Use lower case letters for shelf labels if the item is not a proper noun.
 - Computer-generated labels should be at least a font size of 22.

Additional Resources for Information on the Use of Visual Supports

Tots-n-Tech (2012). Using visual supports with infants and toddlers. Tots-n-Tech/Arizona State University.

https://www.ctdinstitute.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/TnT-News-VisualSupports-Oct12.pdf

Center for Autism and Related Disabilities/University of Florida

<http://card.ufl.edu/resources/visual-supports/>

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies/University of Maine

<https://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/visual-supports/>

Indiana Resource Center for Autism/Indiana University

<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/visualsupport>

For more information on visual supports, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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