

Tip Sheets

Visual Supports in the Early Childhood Setting

What are Visuals?

We all use visual supports (or visuals) daily — often without even realizing it. We use our phones or paper to make lists to help us remember what we need at the grocery store. When we see a yellow M on the side of the road, we know a certain restaurant is coming up.

Visuals are used in similar ways in the early childhood classroom.

- Stop signs on emergency exits remind children they are not to use that door.
- Children’s photos on their cubby or chair helps them identify which one is theirs.
- Posted pictures on toy bins and shelves help children know where things go at cleanup time.

This same concept applies to making daily schedules, easing transitions, making choices, and working through challenging behaviors.

Benefits of Visual Supports

- Children often can’t understand everything being said by an adult. Visuals can be used to simplify instructions.
- Children may struggle verbalizing emotions or needs and wants, and choosing a picture can simplify communication.
- When a child is dealing with big emotions or a challenging behavior, words can feel and be overwhelming. Behaviors can come from a child that is unable to communicate effectively. A provider showing a visual picture or the child being able to choose a visual picture can help the situation resolve easier or quicker.

Tips for Using Visuals

- Visuals are not automatically understood or used. Just like anything new in a classroom, children need to be taught what the visual means and how to use it. Give children opportunities to practice using visuals and positively reinforce their attempts.
- Start simple and work up to more. Once children understand a few basic pictures, you can add on. As children grow and develop, add words to photos to build word recognition.
- Remember to put visuals at children’s eye level.
- State classroom rules in positive “DO” language. Say **inside voice** instead of *don’t shout* and **walking feet** instead of *don’t run*.



For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

Copyright © 2024 Center for Inclusive Child Care

These materials may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. Information in this tip sheet has been modified from multiple sources.

Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.