Look and Learn

Using visual strategies in working with children on the autism spectrum

Amy Robinson, M.S., LPCC
Emily Honken, MSW, LICSW
Picture this….

• You have a day full of appointments…. 
  – And your planner is on the kitchen counter

• You are at the grocery store shopping for a big event…. 
  – Without a list

• You are lost…. 
  – Without a map
Who benefits from visual supports?

Individuals who may exhibit:

- Processing delays
- Difficulty with Executive Functioning: the ability to organize, structure & prioritize
- Difficulty seeing “The Big Picture”
- Theory of the Mind issues: ability to understand another’s perspective
- Sensory challenges involving processing and self-regulation
Who benefits from visual supports?

Individuals who may exhibit:

- Difficulty with retrieval and sequencing of information
- Difficulty picking out important information
- Very literal thinking / rule bound
- Trouble understanding the concept of time
- Lack of fluid movement from one thought, action or activity to another: *Transitions*
- Individuals diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum
Why visual supports? (for those with an ASD)

- Excellent visual learning skills
- Excellent rote memory skills
- Ability to stay with a task when invested
- Promotes errorless teaching
Why visual supports? (for everyone!)

• Provide tangible, concrete information

• Highlight relevant social information

• Provide a concrete reminder of what to do or say

• Decrease reliance on verbal/social prompts

• Ease the anxiety of transitions
Major areas of visuals support

• Communication

• Organization and Structure

• Social Skills & Behavioral Supports
Considerations

- Visual Discrimination
- Visual Orientation
- Colors
- Portability
- Age (developmental and chronological)
- Sensory Issues
COMMUNICATION
Object Representation

• Used for individuals who are not able to associate images with objects

• Can be used for schedules or choice making
PECS

• Picture Exchange Communication System
• Specific method to teach communication.
• Focus is on initiation by child
• Start with single “word” and move to sentences in ordered progression.
PECS

• PECS are used as an interactive communication system

• Can be used in conversation and sentences

• Communication boards use themed pictures for functional choice making
Communication Boards
Cues Cards

• Small portable visual card that can be used to remind individuals of concepts they have learned
• Can be carried regularly after the concept has been taught and phased out after the skill has been mastered
• Can be used for a variety of developmental levels
Cue Card Examples

- **bathroom**
- **STOP**
- **all done**
Cue Card Examples

“SODA”
S: Situation
O: Options
D: Decide
A: Act

STOP
THINK
GO
ORGANIZATION
First/Then Schedules

• First/Then schedules allow people to see what they are doing and what they will be transitioning to next.

• This type of schedule can assist in decreasing anxiety by making the next activity predictable and showing there will be an end to the current activity.
Strip Schedules

- Static schedule boards show routines that stay the same and are only one piece.

- Dynamic schedule boards can be changed. They have many pieces to customize the schedule that can move and be taken off as items are completed.
Organization

• Task reminders can be used if steps are sometimes forgotten
Organization

- Chunk schedules break a larger task into simpler steps
- The simpler steps are presented in chunks to show a complete task
Organization

Task Organizers

• Step by step prompts help a student complete a task more independently

• Fading visual prompts is far easier than fading verbal prompts
Organization

• Schedule checklists show steps in a reasonable sequence

• Steps can be checked off to keep someone engaged and to show accomplishment
Organization

• Task lists should be concrete and easy to understand
Calendars

- Weekly calendars can be used to show the “highlights” of the week
- Weekly calendars can be used to teach projecting ahead
### Joey’s Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekday Behavior</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tue</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thur</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Weekend Behavior</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Backpack Ready by 7:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave house on time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do homework without arguing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chew with mouth closed at dinner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take garbage out by 8:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra good behavior BONUS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total stickers earned for the day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If you earn 4 stickers in one day, your reward will be:**  
Mom will read an extra  
chapter of “Percy Jackson” before bed.

**If you earn 3 stickers on a weekend day, your reward will be:**  
Extra 20 minutes of video game time.

**If you earn 25 stickers in one week, your reward will be:**  
Rent a video game for Sunday night.
Organization
Organization

Why timers are helpful:
- Transitions from a preferred to a non-preferred activity
- To lengthen activities
- To designate a waiting time

For more information see www.timetimer.com
BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS
Social Skills & Behavioral Supports

Purpose:

• Make emotions/arousal levels concrete

• Provide consistent cause and effect for behaviors

• Teach social rules
Social Skills & Behavioral Supports

Reward Boards

- Provide concrete expectation for behavior
- Provides visual reminder of what the goal/reward is and how to obtain it
- Can be adapted across developmental levels
Social Skills & Behavioral Supports

• Pictures or representations of feelings can help teach how to recognize emotions in oneself and others
• Emotion pictures can be used to communication how one is feeling
3 and 5 Point Scales

• Rating scales can be used for many things including:
  – Stress
  – Frustration
  – Anger
  – Voice

• Rating scales take abstract feelings and make them concrete

• Rating scales can help provide cues to assist an individual in staying regulated

Adapted from *The Incredible 5-Point Scale* by Kari Dunn Buron & Mitzi Curtis
Social Skills & Behavioral Supports

Boundary Program

• Define spatial boundaries

• Define appropriate language/discussion points

• Provide concrete rules for social interaction

• Keep individuals safe

Adapted from *Circles of Intimacy* by Leslie Walker-Hirsch, MED
Marklyn P. Champagne, RN MSW
Social Skills & Behavioral Supports

Boundary Program

Red Hug Circle

The people in my Red Hug Circle are family and very close friends.

It is ok to ask for a hug or give hugs to the people in this circle.

Here I can talk about my feelings. This is the only circle where I can talk about family issues.

I can talk about almost everything with people in my Red Hug Circle.
Social Skills & Behavioral Supports

Social Scripts

- Social scripts provide information for a situation that an individual find stressful, confusing, or difficult.
- Social scripts describe the situation and provide answers to the “wh” questions involved in a situation.
Simple Social Scripts

Washing Hands

This is a story about John and washing his hands.

Clean hands keep my toys clean and help me stay healthy.

When I wash my hands I will scrub them with two squirts of soap and rub the tops and the bottoms while I count to 10. I will then, rinse them with warm water.

I will try to wash my hands after playing outside and before eating to keep my toys clean and help me stay healthy.

If I forget to wash my hands or don't know what soap to use I can ask an adult for help.

Mom and Dad will be happy when I wash my hands after playing outside and before I eat.
Memo: Deodorant Needed

To: Jenny
From: Mom

You are older now and sometimes your underarms will sweat.

You will know you are sweating because the part of your body called your “arm pits” will be wet.

You need to put deodorant in your armpits everyday.

People enjoy being with you more if your armpits smell good.

Thanks much,

Love, Mom
Books

• Similar to social scripts, books can be used to prepare individuals for social situations

• Can be used for a variety of developmental levels

• Can incorporate individuals special interest areas

• More discrete teaching method
• Specific tops can be used to teach about relevant issues
• Mainstream book series help to teach about social problem solving
Custom Cartoon Conversations

• Once individuals have learned to utilize social scripts, they can begin to develop their own custom visuals

• When visuals are added, information can be processed more efficiently

• Custom cartoon conversations can be developed with assistance or for some individuals, independently
High for the Day:
Playing with Natalie, Sonya & Jenavie at Recess
Low for the day:
I didn't have anyone to play with at recess.

It looks like those kids are having fun.
I want to play with Gia.
I'm bored.
I wish I had someone to play with.
I hope I can play with someone tomorrow.

Justin
First

Justin: What do you want to play?
Gia: Barbies or princesses.

Second

I wish I could play with Gia.
First

Justin: Gia, what do you want to play?
Gia: Princesses!
Can you teach me how to play Princesses?
Sure! I’ll teach you.

Second

This is the best day ever because Gia is playing with me!

Justin: Playing Together

I’m glad Justin will play with me.
Words to use when I want to find someone to play with.

That looks fun! I want to try!

I'm Justin. What's your name?

Hey, I like to play that too!

I have an idea of what to play!

Can I play too?

Can you teach me how to play that?

Can I show you how to play "Indiana Jones = ?"

I know how to play that game!

What are you guys playing?
Decision Trees

• Can be used for visual problem solving

• Can be easily adapted for “real life” situations and possible outcomes

• Can be adapted for a variety of developmental levels

• Can be helpful in transitioning teenagers into adulthood
Mom says “do your homework now”

Do homework now

- Homework gets done
  - Free time for play
    - Get good grade for having work done on time
      - Will probably feel happy about this
  - Might feel mad or sad if mom gets mad

Do homework later

- Homework gets done
  - Get a bad grade because work was late
  - Mom will give a Consequence for not following directions
  - Free time for play
    - Not as much free time left
      - Mom might get mad For not following directions
  - Will probably feel mad or sad about getting a consequence
Video Modeling

• Use video of peers, family or client engaging in appropriate behavior
  – Social skills
  – Activities of daily living
  – Play skills
iPod Technology

- Portable
- Fits teen culture
- Easy to use
- Easy to program
- Supports generalization of skills across settings
Applications (apps)

- Music
- Video/movie
- Photo
- Calendar / Schedule
- Notes
- Clock / Timer
- Contacts
- Games
QuickCues is a social script app designed for iPods and iPhones that helps teens and young adults on the autism spectrum handle new situations and learn new skills.

QuickCues contains 4 Modules related to Communication, Life Skills, Socialization and Coping.
iPod Uses – Life Skills

• Schedules
• Study habits
• Daily Living Routines
• Job Interviews
• Interests
iPod Uses - Socialization

• Tips for Reciprocal Interaction
• Conversation
• Turn Taking
• Friendships
• Dating
• Bullies
• Manners and Etiquette
• Social Boundaries
iPod Uses - Communication

- Initiating Conversation
- Maintaining Conversation
- Reading Verbal and non Verbal Cues
- Changing and Maintaining Topics
- Understanding Non literal language
iPod Uses - Coping

- Tolerating unexpected change
- Getting “unstuck”
- Learning how and when to take breaks
- Identifying emotions
- Self Advocacy
- Relaxation Strategies
When to Use

- Preparation for new activity
- Transition support
- Sensory tool
- Unstructured times
- Review of successful and difficult times
Where to Use

• Use in group setting
• Tool for individual therapy
• Incorporate into school programming
• Utilize within community activities
• Lifetime tool
Communication Resources

• Boardmaker Software
  Mayer-Johnson, Inc.
  King Software Development
  1989-2007
  www.mayer-johnson.com

• Picture This…
  2004 Silver Lining Multi-media, Inc.
  www.silverliningmm.com

• Eye Pics by Eye Box Tools, Inc.
  www.eyeboxtoolsinc.com
Communication

Resources

• Picture Exchange Communication System
  Pyramid Educational Consultants, Inc.
  www.pecs.com

• Social Stories, Carol Gray
  www.thegraycenter.org