



PARENT TOOLKIT

Using Visuals



What are Visual Supports?

Visual supports are pictures, symbols, or written cues that show a child **what is happening, what to do next, or what is expected**.

They help children who may struggle with:

- remembering instructions
- transitions between activities
- processing verbal language
- anxiety around unpredictability

Instead of relying only on spoken instructions, visuals give **clear, consistent reminders**.

Examples include:

- picture schedules
- checklists
- “first–then” boards
- choice boards
- timers and countdown charts

Why Visuals Work

Visual supports help because they:

- Reduce anxiety by making routines predictable
- Help children process information more slowly and clearly
- Reduce repeated verbal reminders
- Encourage independence
- Support communication for non-speaking or selective-speaking children

Children can **see what is expected**, rather than relying only on memory.

Tips

- **Keep It Simple**
 - Start with **one routine only** (for example, the morning routine).
 - Too many visuals at once can overwhelm a child.
- **Use the Visual With the Child**

- At first, guide your child: “Let’s check the schedule. What’s next?”
- Point to the picture.
- **Be Consistent**
 - Use the visuals **every day** so the child learns to rely on them.
 - Consistency builds understanding.
- **Make It Interactive** - this increases engagement and independence.
 - ticking tasks
 - moving Velcro pictures
 - flipping cards
 - placing magnets
- **Celebrate Success**
 - Praise the child when they follow the visual:
 - “Great job checking the schedule!”
 - Positive reinforcement encourages use.

Troubleshooting

- **If your child ignores the visual**
 - Use it **together first** before expecting independence.
- **If routines change**
 - Update the visual schedule so it stays accurate.
 - Unexpected changes can cause stress.
- **If your child resists, becomes bored or stops engaging**
 - Start with **fun or preferred routines**, not difficult ones.
 - **Refresh the visuals.** Change pictures, colours, or layouts, or use photos of the child doing the activity to make the routine feel new again.
 - **Give the child ownership.** Let them help create the schedule, choose pictures, or move the cards so they feel more involved and in control.
 - **Make the routine interactive.** Use Velcro cards, magnets, tick boxes, or a “finished” section so the child can physically engage with the routine.
 - **Simplify the routine if needed.** Reduce the number of steps and focus on the most important tasks to avoid overwhelming the child.
 - **Stay flexible and reduce pressure.** If resistance continues, pause, support the child calmly, and reintroduce visuals later—visuals should support the child, not become a source of stress.

Visual supports help children feel **safe, capable, and independent**.

They turn routines from something confusing into something predictable.

With time, many children begin to **check their schedules independently** and need fewer reminders.