Visual Supports
A Quick Start Guide

Why Visual Supports Matter

Visuals help children understand what's happening, what's expected, and what comes next.

They support:

- Following routines (arrival, cleanup, toileting)
- Understanding expectations
- Making choices
- Managing transitions
- Reducing frustration during busy moments

Choose the Right Type of Visual

Select visuals that match the child's age, abilities, and interests:

- Real objects
- Photos
- Simple drawings
- Words + pictures
- Task cards or step-by-step guides

Adapted from Meadan, H., Ostrosky, M. M., Triplett, B., Michna, A., & Fettig, A. (2011). Using visual supports with young children with autism spectrum disorder. Teaching exceptional children, 43(6), 28-35.

Use Visuals in Different Ways

Visuals can be used to support many parts of the day:

- **Visual schedules** to show the order of activities
- **Environmental labels** for shelves, centers, and materials
- **Rule and expectation cards** (walking feet, gentle hands, quiet voice)
- **Visual scripts** to support social skills (asking for a turn, joining play)
- **Step-by-step routines** for tasks like handwashing, dressing, or cleanup

Use Visuals Everywhere

Visual supports can be used:

- Indoors and outdoors
- During structured activities and free play
- In childcare centers, preschools, and homes

Teach Children How to Use Them

Visuals work best when children are taught how to use them.

- Model how to check or follow the visual
- Practice together during calm moments
- Use visuals consistently across routines and environments
- Store visuals in small binders, rings, or pockets so they're always available

Monitor and Adjust

If a visual isn't helping, try:

- A different type (photo instead of drawing)
- Making the visual larger or smaller
- Simplifying the number of steps
- Adding color coding
- Involving the child in choosing or creating visuals

Visuals help children understand their world, participate more fully, and build independence across settings!