

Visual Activity Schedules

Function of Intervention:

When learning routines, some individuals may benefit from having steps presented in a meaningful sequence with a clear start and finish (Schneider & Goldstein, 2009). Particularly, children with challenging behaviors, an intellectual disability, or autism spectrum disorder benefit from the use of visual schedules. Visual activity schedules are especially helpful to improve transition and on-task behavior (Zimmerman, Ledford, & Barton, 2017; MacDuff, Krantz, & McClannahan, 1993).

Description:

Visual activity schedules consist of photographs depicting leisure and occupational activities organized in sequence. The photographs are attached to a background and displayed in the individual's view (i.e., on his/her desk). Photos can be re-ordered when the sequence of activities changes.

Examples of Potential Activities/Photos for Illustration:

- Class schedule (e.g., art class, lunch, recess)
- Desk clean-up (e.g., pick up pencils, put pencils into pouch, put pouch into desk)
- Pack-up time (e.g., go to cubby, grab backpack, line up at door)

Procedures (adapted from Macduff et al., 1993):

1. Create a visual activity schedule using photographs that depict activities the student will complete.
2. Place the activity schedule within the student's view.
3. Explain the order of activities to the student.
4. Teaching period: For the first week of using the schedule, prompt the student to direct their attention to their activity schedule prior to making any transitions. For example, say "Art class is over, so next we will go to lunch" while pointing to the appropriate photos. Prompt each transition in this manner.
5. Fade prompts for each task using forward chaining until the student can perform tasks independently. For example, first remove the prompt for the first step. Then continue fading prompts until the student can perform all tasks without prompts. This denotes the end of the teaching period. (Note: The teaching period of one week can be modified depending on the individual's developmental level.)
6. After the teaching period, allow the student to transition independently prior to using any prompts.
7. Upon transition time if the individual does not transition appropriately, guide his/her attention to the activity schedule (e.g., point at the schedule, gesture to the schedule, verbally instruct him/her to check their schedule).
8. Immediately reinforce the student for making appropriate transitions.

Critical Components:

- Prompts
- Immediate reinforcement

Materials:

- Laminated photos of leisure activities and occupational tasks
- Background for photos (e.g., construction paper, binder)
- Velcro strips to attach photos to background

References:

- MacDuff, G. S., MacDuff, G. S., Krantz, P. J., Krantz, P. J., McClannahan, L. E., & McClannahan, L. E. (1993). Teaching children with autism to use photographic activity schedules: Maintenance and generalization of complex response chains. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 26*, 89-97. doi:10.1901/jaba.1993.26-89
- Schneider, N., & Goldstein, H. (2010). Using social stories and visual schedules to improve socially appropriate behaviors in children with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 12*, 149-160. doi:10.1177/1098300709334198
- Zimmerman, K. N., Ledford, J. R., & Barton, E. E. (2017). Using visual activity schedules for young children with challenging behavior. *Journal of Early Intervention, 39*, 339-358.

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