

# HOW TO MAKE AND USE A VISUAL SCHEDULE

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### Introduction

As was mentioned by Allen (2015) in chapter 4 of this manual, a visual schedule is a visual system that provides information about the sequence and order of activities in a child's day. A visual schedule is a valuable teaching tool that can be used by teachers, parents and therapists, to make sure that a child is familiar with the day's programme. Visual schedules therefore provide consistent cues about a child's daily routine and will help him to anticipate what will happen next. In this section we are going to take a closer look at exactly how to make a visual schedule and then how to use it. But before we get to that, it's important to note that there are many different types of schedules.

### Types of visual schedules

Various types of schedules can be made, depending on the child's needs and level of functioning.

1. **Daily schedule:** The daily schedule shows the big picture for the day and is generally not very specific, e.g. "play time" may be anything, for example playing with puzzles, trains, blocks, playing outside etc. (Bhargava, n.d.).
2. **Part of the day:** If you cannot fit the individual's entire day on the schedule (or if the individual does better with less information at a time), it is fine to simply put up part of the day. While he is engaged in one of the last activities on the schedule, you can arrange the schedule to include the next part of the day or have it ready on another board for putting up once the first section is complete. You may also want to think about what the child has the most difficulty with. If the child struggles with bedtime activities, you may want to have a visual schedule specifically for the bedtime routine.
3. **Mini schedule for the teaching of skills:** A mini schedule is a visual system that represents a task analysis of an activity, in other words, breaking down an activity into simple, clear and manageable steps. For example, pictures may be displayed for the task of washing hands or for toilet routines.

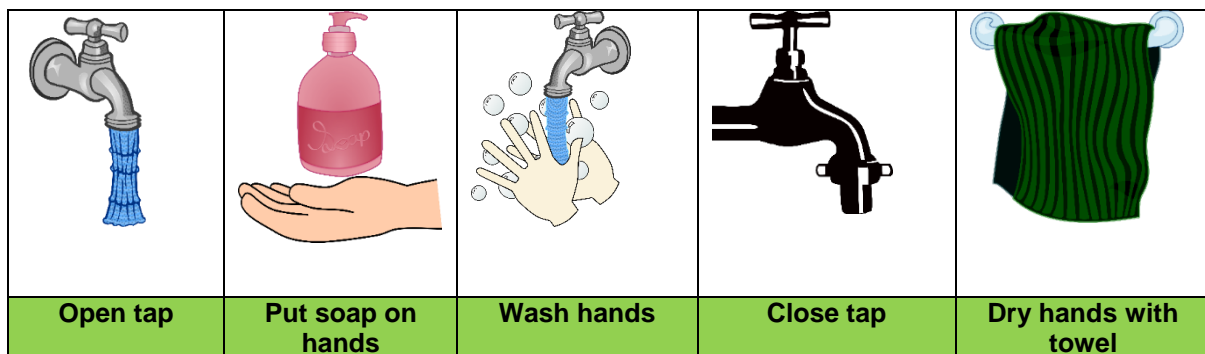


Figure 1: An example of a mini schedule on washing hands

4. **First-then:** A ‘first-then’ visual schedule informs the child about the sequence of events he is expected to participate in. It assists the child transition from one activity to another as he knows what he will be doing next. It can also motivate the child to complete a non-preferred task, especially if it is followed by a preferred activity. For example, “*First you do your work, then you may play on the computer*” (Bhargava, n.d.).

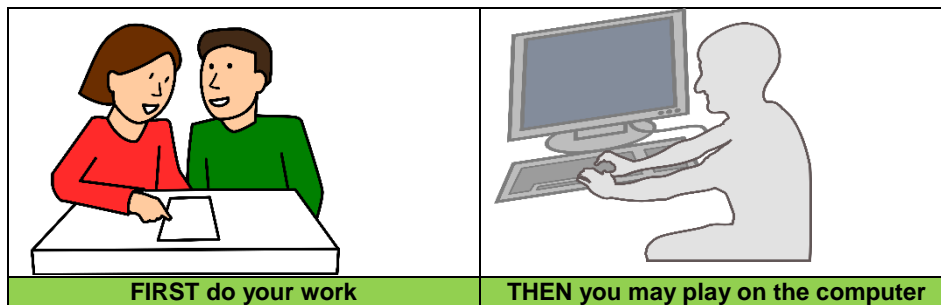


Figure 2: An example of a first-then visual schedule

## How to make a daily schedule: A step-by-step guide

### Step 1: Gather materials

Gather all the materials that you may need to make a schedule e.g. scissors, glue, poster board, paper, sticky double sided Velcro, laminator, open end envelope, and pictures (photographs, pictures from magazines, computer programs, food labels, etc.).

### Step 2: Break down of daily activities

Write down (in chronological order) the activities that are planned for the day across various environments (home, school, community), or for different parts of the day, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Break down of activities

<b>Before School</b>	Get dressed	Brush hair	Eat breakfast	Brush teeth	Wait for bus	Drive to school
<b>At School</b>	Morning circle	Arts and crafts	Snack time	Free play	Work in books	Story time
<b>After School</b>	Lunch	Nap	Free play	Swimming lessons	Snack	Watch television
<b>Night time</b>	Supper	Bath	Watch television	Bed time story	Brush teeth	Sleep

### Step 3: Decide on the type of symbol that will be used to represent each activity (object, photograph, picture or word schedules)

Children communicate and understand at different symbolic levels. The type of symbols that are going to be used to represent each activity, will depend on the child’s level of functioning. You therefore first have to determine what type of

symbols will be the easiest for the child to understand. For most beginning communicators, real objects, partial objects or photographs may likely be used. Others may use coloured pictures, line drawings or even written words. A combination of symbols can also be used in order to expose the child to the next level of representation, for example, have the photograph on the one side and the line drawing at the back of it.

**Step 4: Decide on an appropriate symbol that will represent each activity**

The next step is to decide what object or picture symbol will be associated with each of the activities. For example, a spoon for lunch, a block for playtime, a crayon for work time, a milk container for eating breakfast, and socks for getting dressed. The same objects should be used to represent the activity every time (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). An example from Bornman and Rose (2017, p142) is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Designing a visual schedule

Activity	Real objects	Pictures / line drawings	Written words
Circle time	Piece of carpet	Group of children symbol	Circle time
Break	Lunch box	Lunch food symbol	Break
Literacy	Storybook and pencil	Books symbol	Literacy
Arts and crafts	Paint brush	Pencil and scissors symbol	Arts and crafts
Free play	Miniature car, dolls and balls	Toys symbol	Free play

An example of a visual schedule made with coloured line drawings is provided in Figure 3.

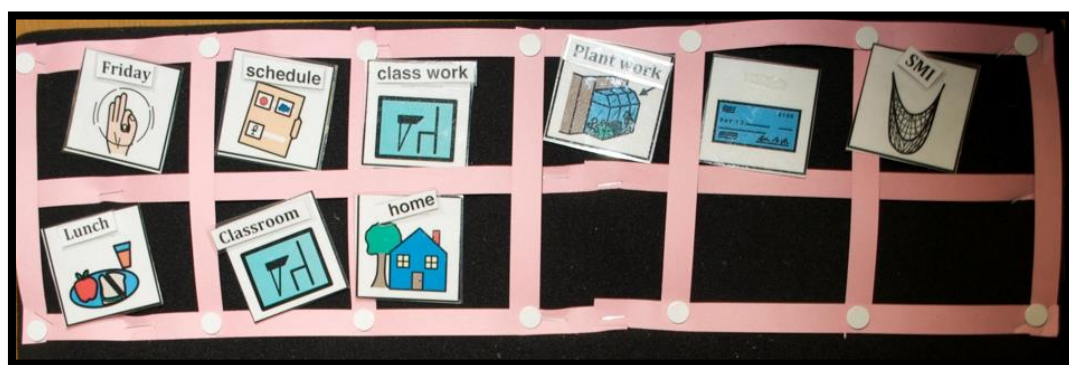


Figure 3: A visual schedule made with coloured line drawings

Photographer: Adam Pulzetti (Website: [Paths to literacy, Perkins school for the blind](http://Paths to literacy, Perkins school for the blind))

**Step 5: Prepare your symbols**

Make your picture symbols child proof and child friendly; it is always good to laminate the symbols, as they will last longer. It is also important to write the word underneath each symbol. Finally, attach sticky Velcro (hard side / male) to the back of each symbol.

## Step 6: Construct a way to display the symbols

Real or partial object symbols can be placed in a series of containers such as two litre ice cream containers, shoe boxes, lunch boxes, or a series of transparent plastic bags hung on cups hooks, just to name a few.

If photographs or graphic symbols are used, they can be displayed in a photo album, on a clip board, a felt board or on a key ring. Another example would be to laminate a large poster board and put a Velcro strip (soft Velcro / female) across or down the centre. Make it long enough to hold pictures for several activities. Teachers may also want to tape the schedule to a child's desk, so that the child can look at the schedule and know what is coming next (Bornman & Rose, 2017).



*Figure 4: An example of an object schedule*

*Photographer: Adam Pulzetti (Website: [Paths to literacy, Perkins school for the blind](#))*



*Figure 5: A tactile object schedule for learners with a visual impairment*

*Photographer: Adam Pulzetti (Website: [Paths to literacy, Perkins school for the blind](#))*

For a few examples of schedules using pictures, click on the links below:

- [A number of schedules on a key ring](#)
- [An example of a visual schedule with coloured pictures](#)
- [An example of a visual schedule with a morning, afternoon and evening section](#)
- [Individual planners](#)

## Step 7: Devise a method for identifying finished activities

Each schedule must incorporate some way in which the child can indicate that a certain activity has been completed. For real objects, there should be a finished box into which the child can deposit the object after finishing the activity. If photographs or other pictures are used, the child can simply turn it over to indicate “all done”. In this case, a piece of Velcro goes on the front of the picture and on the back. Or, add a pocket / envelope at the end of the schedule that represents “finished” or “all done”, so that the child can move the pictures to the finished area (pocket / envelope) at the end of each activity. Please refer to Figure 6 for an example.

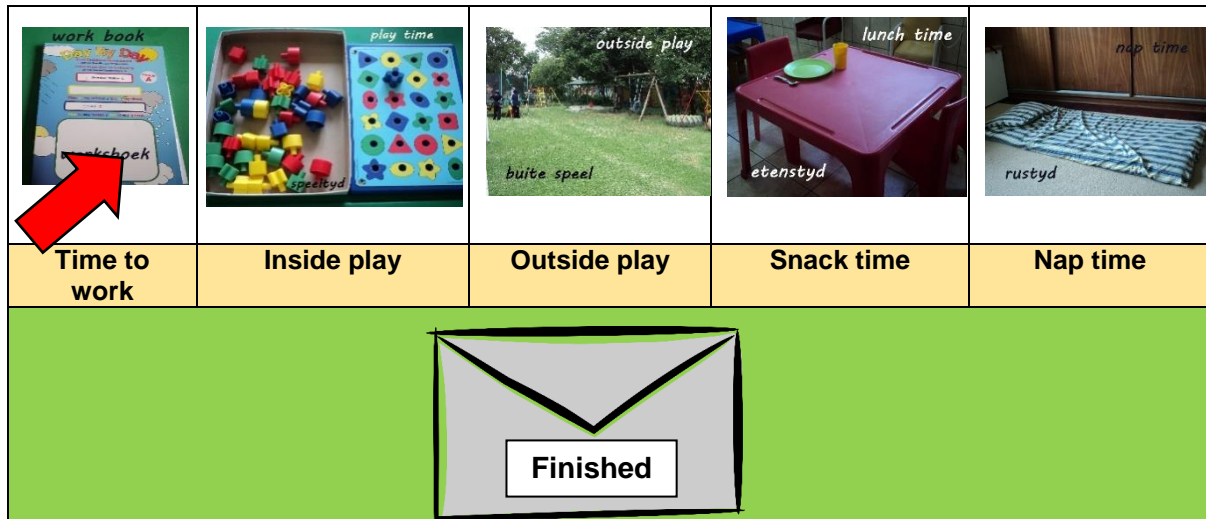


Figure 6: A schedule with a “finished” envelope at the bottom

Here is another [example](#), which you can find online.

## Step 8: Construct the visual schedule

Arrange the symbols in chronological order to represent at least four or five activities in the child’s day. You can Velcro the pictures to the schedule in the order activities occur. Present the symbols from left to right (first to last) if the child scans horizontally or top to bottom (first to last) for vertical scanners. The orientation depends on how the child scans.

## How to use the visual schedule

- **Step 1:** The parent or teacher should each day put the pictures up according to the day's schedule; let the child help you so you can discuss what will happen together.
- **Step 2:** Before each activity, prompt the child to go to the schedule and select the next symbol in the sequence, by pulling the symbol off or taking it out of the container. Then prompt the child to take the symbol to the activity that it represents.
- **Step 3:** When the activity is completed, prompt the child to discard the item, as was discussed above (e.g. put in finished box or turn symbol over).



- **Step 4:** Look for signs that indicate that the child with CCN or LNFS is making a connection between the symbol and the activity it represents (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013).

## Practical tips for implementation of a visual schedule

- Like any new concept, using a schedule is something that you need to teach the child; it may not automatically have meaning to him. Use enough prompting to ensure the child gets there, but fade prompts out slowly so that the child goes to the schedule with increasing independence.
- If used in school, use the schedule consistently and on a daily basis as part of the class routine. It should be taught directly and should therefore not be treated as an incidental teaching tool (Bornman & Rose, 2017).
- Actively involve the child in the monitoring of his schedule (e.g., peel off completed activities, check off boxes for activities). If the schedule is going to change for some reason, you can rearrange the pictures together.
- Keep the schedule near the child and at eye level and praise the child for following the schedule appropriately.
- Some children may need more teaching than others to understand the meaning of a visual schedule. Orient the child to the schedule and model by hand-over-hand, touching, or pulling off the pictures. Gently, prompt him physically (from behind), to go to the desired area. It is important not to be in front of the child leading him to the area, as this can cause him to become overly dependent on you rather than looking at the schedule (Davies, 2008).
- If the child is distractible, and likely to lose focus on the way to an activity, you can use a matching picture schedule. In this type of schedule, you place an identical picture in the area that he is going to. The child then takes his picture and matches it to the one you have mounted in the area (Davies, 2008).
- Many preschool or primary school teachers display a visual schedule that goes through the day. Teachers should go over the schedule of the day first thing in the morning. If there are changes in the day, (i.e. a field trip or a guest speaker), these pictures can be added and removed as necessary. If there is not a card created, new pictures can be quickly made (Lesson Pixs, n.d.).

## Helpful resources and websites

- [How-To Templates: Visual schedules](#)
- [How to make a visual schedule for your child](#)
- [Printable pictures and more information on using picture schedules](#)
- [Printable schedule for "I go potty by myself"](#)
- [E-learning visuals \(Geneva Centre for Autism\)](#)
- [How to make a visual schedule for a child](#)
- [Visual Schedules](#)
- [How to make a visual schedule: Do2Learn.com Schedules](#)
- [Structured Daily Schedule.pdf](#)

## Videos:

The following videos provide more information on the use of visual schedules:

- [Visual Based Strategies: How to develop and use visual tools](#)
- [Using Visual Schedules to Help Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)
- [How to use a visual schedule](#)

## References

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