VISUAL SCHEDULES AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Introduction

Etched into the diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a preference for routine and predictability, placing learners with ASD at odds directly with the noisy, bustling and often chaotic environment of the average school. All types of learners with ASD benefit from a structured educational environment.

"I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me…when somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures. One of the most profound mysteries of autism has been the remarkable ability of most people with autism to excel at visual spatial skills while performing so poorly at verbal skills"

(Temple Grandin, Grandin, 1995, p.19).

Many people with ASD are thought to be visual learners, so presenting information in a visual way can help to encourage and support people's communication, language development and ability to process information. It can also promote independence, build confidence and raise self-esteem (National Autistic Society, 2013).

What is a visual schedule?

A visual schedule tells the individual the sequence of upcoming activities or events through the use of objects, photographs, line drawings/symbols, or words. A schedule is a framework that outlines who, what, where and when. Visual schedules are designed to match the needs of the individual and may vary in length and form. Visual schedules can be used to help most individuals with ASD. They are easily adaptable, portable and can be used in school and also at home. They are presented in either a top to bottom or left to right sequence.

Schedules in the autistic classroom

An individual visual schedule is one of the most powerful tools we can give an individual with autism.

Division TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children) identified five areas to consider when designing visual schedules for students (Cox & Boswell, 1999), namely forms of representation, length of the schedule, methods of manipulating the schedule, location of the schedule and initiating use of the schedule.

Forms of representation
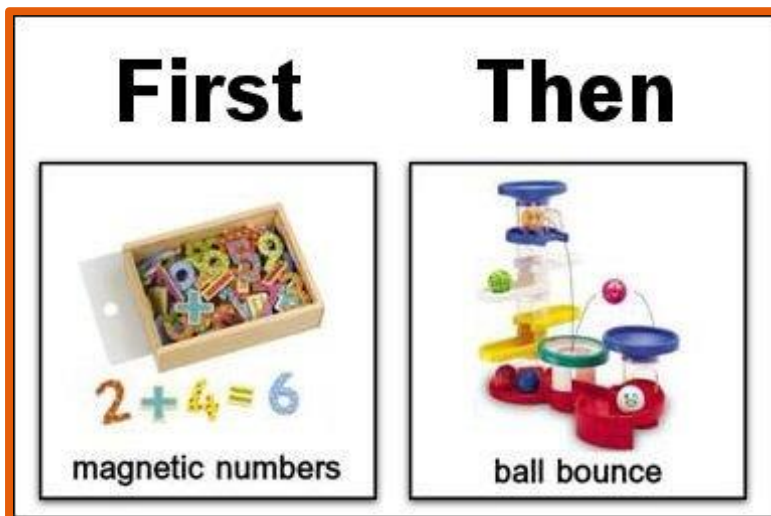
Transition object

This is the initial level of representation for visual support. Deciding on an object for each activity is the first step. There are no specific objects that must be used but it's

important to make these as concrete as possible. Many common objects are: the inside of a loo roll to represent toilet, a glue stick to represent art or a spoon to represent breakfast. Miniature items are another great object of reference for schedules.

https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/4e/4d/a9/4e4da95e7164bd5b718dd5bdc5e2d497.jpg

First / Then sequence

*http://www.grocerypecs.com/toypecs/autismminischedule.jpg*

Length of the schedule

Deciding on how much information is placed on the schedule will address the increasing anxieties of individuals with an ASD. Some individuals may only cope with a few activities at a time while others may require a whole day or even a whole week.
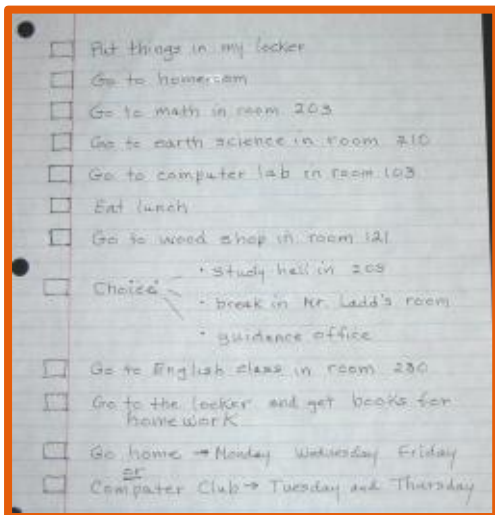
Part day objects/pictures/symbols

http://realautismsolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Visual-schedule-1.png
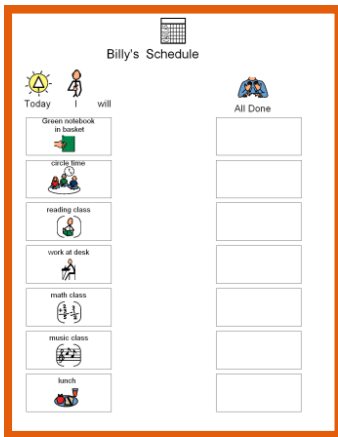
Full day objects/pictures/symbols

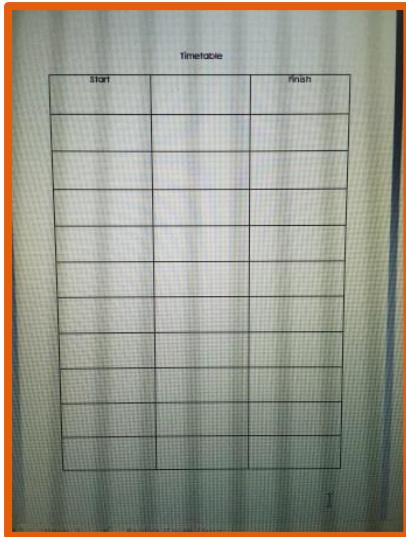*Picture from Pinterest*

Written cards

http://www.ttac.vcu.edu/media/ttac/images/main-section/asd-section/schedules/ms_schedule.png

Written list- tick sheet

Location of the schedule

The schedule can initially be presented to the individual on a moveable board or card. As the individual becomes more familiar and independent with the schedule it can be placed on a wall, desk, and door in a transition area. For older individuals this schedule can be in a folder or even on a cell phone.

What next?

It's important to remember that these schedules need to be explicitly taught before the individual is able to use it effectively and independently. Transition objects, photos and line drawings need to be removed from the schedule and placed in a finished box or folder to visually show the individual that those activities are finished and what is still going to happen. This will address some of the increasing anxieties experienced by individuals with an ASD.

References and recommended reading

Cox, R., & Boswell, S. (1999). *Checklist for the individualization of visual schedules.* TEACCH Level 1 Seminar.

Grandin,T.(1995). *Thinking in pictures and other reports from my life with autism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Mesibov, G., Shea, V., & Schopler, E. (2005). *The TEACCH approach to autism spectrum disorders.* New York: Plenum Press.

National Autistic Society, United Kingdom. (2013). *Visual Supports Information Sheet*. Retrieved from http://www.autism.org.uk/visualsupports

Visual Schedules: How and why to use them in the classroom. Retrieved from http://www.education.com/reference/article/visual-schedule-classroom-autism-ASD/