

25 Reasons to Use Visual Strategies

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An organization that provides consultation, training, and professional development with the goal of improving communication

We use visual tools to accomplish a purpose. Perhaps we use something visual to help a student understand a situation. Maybe we provide a visual prompt so a student can accomplish a task more independently.

Think of the **purpose** of a visual tool. What does the student need to understand? What would help him participate better? Defining the **need** guides the decision about what kind of tool to use. Identifying the purpose of a visual tool helps us know how to use it.

Is your school or home environment set up to provide the visual support your students can benefit from?

How many of these functions are accomplished in your environment with visual tools?

Count how many ways your students currently receive **visual** support.

1. **Establish attention**

Looking helps students establish attention better than just listening. Once they have focused their attention, the rest of the communication message can get in.

2. Give information

How do students get information to answer the who, what, why, where, when questions?

3. Explain social situations

The social world can be confusing. People are moving, changing and often unpredictable. Sharing social information both verbally and through writing helps students understand.

4. Give choices

How do students know what the options are? What is available? What is not available?

5. Give structure to the day

Telling what is happening or what is not happening. Sharing the big picture tends to reduce anxiety.

6. Teach routines

Following multiple steps in a routine will be easier when the student can see what they are. They will learn a routine faster when they don't make a lot of mistakes.

7. Organize materials in the environment

Where are the things we need? Is it clear where to put supplies away when it is clean up time?

8. Organize the space in the environment

Can the student identify his own space to work or play or sit? Which parts of the environment can he use and which parts are "off limits."

9. Teach new skills

Learning to operate a new toy or piece of equipment. Learning a new task or academic skill.

10. Support transitions

Stopping one activity to start another. Moving from one environment to another. Anything that involves a shift or change.

11. Stay on task

Remembering what the current activity is and staying involved with it until it is completed. What does it mean to be “finished?”

12. Ignore distractions

Help students consciously focus their attention on desired activities or interactions.

13. Manage time

How long is 5 minutes or one hour? How much time is there before a transition in the schedule? Time is invisible. Timers and clocks turn time into something students can see. . .something concrete and visual.

14. Communicate rules

People presume students know the rules. That is often not true. Perhaps they don't remember. Or they don't understand. Or they get too impulsive. Etc., etc.

15. Assist students in handling change

Prepare for something that is going to change. Preparing students when something will be different from what they normally expect can prevent many problems from occurring.

16. Guide self-management

Students need to learn how to manage themselves when they get anxious or encounter a problem.

17. Aid memory

Remembering what to do or when to do it. Remembering the name of an object or a person. (Think about how many ways you provide cues for yourself for this one!)

18. Speed up slow thinking

Some students have lots of information in their brains, but it takes them a very long time to access it. Visual cues can speed that process.

19. Support language retrieval

Did you ever have an experience where you know someone's name but you just can't remember it? Or you know what something is but can't recall the word? Once you hear it or see it you instantly remember. (The older we are,

the worse it becomes!) Students can experience the same challenges in remembering and word retrieval.

20. Provide structure

Structure means organized and predictable. Many students function better in environments where things don't change much. Strive for an environment that provides visual organization and information.

21. Learn vocabulary

Create a personal dictionary with pictures and words of important vocabulary: peoples' names, favorite toys or videos or activities or places. Students will learn that information when they can access it over and over.

22. Communicate emotions

Students demonstrate a variety of emotions with their actions. Translating those responses into pictures or written language gives an opportunity to explain, clarify or validate their experience.

23. Clarify verbal information

What I understood might not be what you meant. Making it visual helps clarify our conversation. It eliminates the confusion.

24. Organize life information

Think of phone numbers, calendars, cooking instructions, shopping lists, social security numbers, appointments, etc.

25. Review & remember

One of the greatest benefits of making something visual is that you can keep it. Verbal language flies away. It disappears. Keeping the visual information to review over and over helps students remember and understand.

Giving information to students in a concrete visual form helps them handle the many happenings during a day that can cause confusion or frustration. It gives them the structure necessary to better handle situations that are difficult for them.

Visual strategies provide a way for students to participate more independently in their life activities.

Count the ways that your students receive visual support consistently in their communication environments. Did you think of any new ideas to try?

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