

Visual Supports

Use this Tip Sheet as a guide for implementing visual supports in your program.

What are Visual Supports?

Images, colors, hand signals, or objects used to guide youth in activities or routines. Use visual supports to reinforce verbal instructions.

Why Do We Use Visual Supports?

Our brains process images faster than sounds or words! Visuals help reinforce verbal instructions and can help youth understand expectations.

Children who have difficulty with an established routine or transitions may benefit from visual supports to reinforce the routine.

Try These Visual Supports (details on page 2)

- Visual schedule
- Sequence card
- Colors/Shapes
- 3D objects
- Hand signals
- Sound meter
- First/Then card
- Pictures
- Logos
- Transition box
- Work in Progress signs

Helpful Hint!

It may be particularly helpful for youth who struggle the most to have program staff move closer to them when demonstrating visual supports. Show the entire class the visual schedule, then make eye contact and offer one-on-one support to the child(ren) next to you.

Teach > Model > Practice

For visual supports to be successful, you must assign value to an image. A red octagon means nothing to children until we teach > model > practice that it means to stop!

How to Create Visual Supports

Visual schedule • First/Then card

Use images – preferably photos of your own program environment – to visually show the order of activities. A visual schedule can show your entire morning or afternoon while a first/then card very specifically shows the next two activities. Print on cardstock, laminate and use Velcro to attach and move images on the card.



Pictures • Colors/Shapes • Logos

Use images, colors, shapes, or logos to label your program environment (a stop sign on a door or a picture of a paintbrush on the arts and crafts box) to help transition between activities.



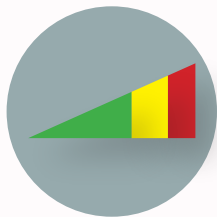
3D Objects • Transition box

When possible, consider showing children the actual objects used in their next activity. Use an actual fork and plate to demonstrate that lunchtime is next, or pull out the “Naptime Box” every day before naptime that has a blanket, diaper, and pillow. You can also give activity options using objects – hold out a paintbrush and an egg shaker to a child who can choose between arts and music for free play.



Hand signals

Establish gestures or hand signals for transitions or noise levels. One arm in the air may mean everyone lines up to go outside, or both hands up means youth can be as loud as they want while a “Quiet Coyote” means everyone needs to be silent.



Sound meter

Hang a sign or poster on the wall using colors or the shape of a stoplight with a button or pointer to mark where the current noise level of the room should be (green = play voice, etc.).



Work in Progress

Use “Stop” or “Work in Progress” signs to indicate to children where they should not play or for children to indicate to their peers when they step away, they will be returning to their area.