Why it is important and valuable for both children and teaching staff to use visuals

1. We all like to have an idea of what is going to happen in our day. Children miss most of the language and social/behavioral cues that help the rest of us understand what is happening. Children can become anxious, resistant and may misbehave simply because they have no way to anticipate the events that come upon them each day. Visuals and visual schedules quickly inform the child about the day's expectations.

2. Some children very obviously have difficulty with receptive and expressive language. It is clear to us that these children need visual supports as a supplement to verbal communication. Other children appear to have good or even excellent receptive and expressive language skills.

3. Visuals are tangible and non-transitory; language is fleeting. A child may not have heard what the teacher said, but still has the visual for reference.

4. Once the child has a visual schedule, his or her behavior will settle. Thus, a schedule does not make the child appear to be different; it helps him appear to be more the same.

5. Visuals provide independence by removing the need for the student to ask others (particularly adults) about what comes next. The fact that the student functions more independently (“normally”) can increase his or her acceptance by other students.

6. Many children have a poor sense of time and have difficulty understanding the vocabulary of time and order (e.g. before, after, then, yesterday, first, second). These words are used daily however as the schedule is set up. Thus, use of schedules teaches time and time concepts and vocabulary directly, routinely and systematically.

7. Many children have attentional difficulties. Visuals are a support to the inattentive or ill focused child.

8. The use of visuals capitalizes on the visual learning/memory strength that some children have. The child will often remember what s/he has seen on the visual, although what they have been told may have been forgotten.

9. The use of visuals is one support strategy that can provide the organization, structure and predictability that are so essential to individuals. When they lack such supports, individuals find the world to be highly unpredictable and confusing.

10. Visual schedules teach the importance of organization in a day. The child who learns to prepare a visual schedule is developing a habit that will promote good organizational methods throughout life.

11. Visual schedules minimize the need to write as the daily agenda is being established; printing and writing are often difficult for the preschool aged child.

12. Using visuals gives the child a sense of some autonomy and control of his daily events in a world of confusing demands.

13. Because they provide a means for the child to anticipate upcoming events, visual schedules help to ease the student through transitions. Thus, they are a means of reducing rigid behavior. In fact, they promote flexible behavior.

14. Visuals provide a means by which adults can systematically introduce the element of change into a student's day.

15. Visuals increase on-task behavior and therefore increase school readiness skills.

16. The alternating pattern of choice and work items within the visual schedule in effect teaches the child that there are some required tasks within the day that are followed by more preferred activities.

17. Visual schedules serve as a reminder to a child that a preferred activity is only one or two steps away after completion of a non-preferred task. Thus, the schedule helps the child to learn patience and persistence.

18. When a student sees movement (clothes pin, covering a picture, etc.) on the schedule to indicate task completion, he is able to see his daily progress. This visual representation of accomplishment helps to build a sense of success and thus to improve self-esteem.

19. Visuals remove the necessity of having an adult verbally direct the student to each upcoming event. The student is thus gaining independence and autonomy, and the lack of direct adult verbal direction removes from the situation, what might otherwise become an opportunity for verbal argument or negotiation.

20. Research has demonstrated that visual systems of communication support the development of oral communication in non-verbal children. This evidence can serve to reassure those who fear that such systems will inhibit language development in those whose language is delayed.

21. Once the student knows how the visuals work, he or she will be less dependent upon consistency of staffing in order to function. Teachers or support people can be absent and the day won’t "fall apart" for the student.

22. “A picture is worth a thousand words.” A picture certainly conveys a message quickly; it’s an instant read, taking less time to deal with than even ten words of text.

23. Visuals work so effectively that you will want to offer their advantages to all children to enhance their independence and make your job as a teacher more enjoyable.

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