



Helpful Hints for Parents: Visual Schedules

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What is it?

Visual schedules are used with children to create structure and predictability. A visual schedule shows a child exactly what to expect and teaches a sense of beginning and end to activities. A visual schedule can use pictures, words, or both. Parents can use actual pictures of specific events/people/places or more general pictures depending on the child's abilities and understanding. The idea is that the child learns to follow a schedule, becomes more self sufficient, and uses the schedule to help guide his or her behavior.

The most helpful element of visual schedules is that they combine both VISUAL and AUDITORY information for children. A direction to a child ("go brush your teeth and put your pajamas on and go to bed") gives children only verbal input. A list (a shopping list that reads "bread, milk, cereal) gives only visual input. Visual schedules, when paired with verbal cues, allow children to HEAR and SEE information. Additionally, when visual schedules are placed in a specific location, children can reference them over time. This teaches them to pace themselves and keep track of what tasks they have completed and what they still need to do.






Visual schedules can look very different, but all schedules should have the following elements:

- Something to signal the beginning and end
- Accurate and simple descriptions of events
- A way to signal when the activity is complete (a check box, crossing an item off the list, moving an icon to the "finished" section).

Visual schedules are helpful additions in a variety of settings including home, school, and therapy sessions.

What's it like?

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
School	School	School	School	School	Basketball	Sleep in!
Home	Soccer	Home	Piano Lessons	Home	Home	Home

Game	
Drawing	
Trains & Tracks	
Swing	
Go home	

Visual schedules can be used for long periods of time, such as events during the week or for short periods of time, such as activities within a therapy session. They can also be used to teach sequences of actions.

They can use words, pictures, or a combination of both

-  toothpaste on toothbrush
-  brush teeth
-  top teeth 1 minute
-  bottom teeth 1 minute
-  rinse

How is it used?

Like any new task, your child will need to be taught to use a schedule. Think about what type of schedule will best meet your child's needs. Some children prefer to see each step of an activity, while other children prefer to see it in simpler terms (first/then).

NIGHT TIME SCHEDULE

	Play game		brush teeth
	wash hands		use toilet
	eat dinner		read story
	do yoga		go to sleep

First / Then

 Put Toys Away	 Bubbles
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When you want to draw your child's attention to the schedule, say, "Let's check our schedule". Say, "this is first ____ then ____, etc. and then we are all done". Point to each item as you read it out loud.

Reference the schedule often throughout the day/activity/process. After each activity is complete, reference the schedule. Say, "what is finished?" and have your child tell you. Then, cross it off and say or move it to the all done side and say, "what is next?"

Tips:

- Use the schedule proactively. Do not wait until your child is tantruming to write a schedule for them. A schedule that is used proactively may prevent the meltdown from happening in the first place.
- Use the schedule consistently. Do not assume your child no longer needs a schedule just because they completed a routine without a meltdown. It is likely the schedule helped them transition and removing it may cause confusion, stress, etc.
- Use the schedule in a variety of ways. Your child may be frustrated if the schedule always signals a non-preferred activity at the end (going to bed). Consider using schedules to lead your child to preferred activities (a fun game at the end of homework time, a special dessert after washing the dishes, etc.).