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Visual Schedules — What They Are and How They Help

Dear Triumph ABA Parents,

For many children with autism, uncertainty can feel overwhelming. Not knowing what is happening next, when an activity will end, or what to expect during the day can sometimes lead to frustration, anxiety, or difficulty transitioning. One of the most effective ways to reduce that stress is through the use of visual schedules. Visual schedules provide children with a clear, visual representation of what their day or activity will look like. Whether using pictures, icons, words, or objects, these schedules help make routines more predictable and manageable. They can support independence, reduce power struggles, improve transitions, and help children feel more confident navigating daily life.



Visual schedules can be used almost anywhere — at home, school, therapy sessions, in the community, or even during outings and vacations. Some families use full-day schedules, while others use smaller “first/then” boards or mini step-by-step visuals for specific routines like brushing teeth, getting dressed, or bedtime.

This month, we are exploring simple ways to introduce and use visual schedules effectively at home. Remember, the goal is not perfection — it’s helping your child better understand their world and feel more successful within it.





Tips for Using Visual Schedules Successfully

1

Start Simple: Visual schedules do not need to be complicated to be effective. Starting with just 2–3 steps helps children learn how to use the system without becoming overwhelmed.

Try this: Begin with a simple “First / Then” board such as:

First homework → Then iPad or First brush teeth → Then bedtime story

2

Use Visuals That Match Your Child’s Understanding: Some children respond best to real photos, while others can use icons, drawings, or written words.

Try this: Take pictures of your child’s actual backpack, bathroom, toothbrush, or favorite snack to personalize schedules.

3

Keep the Schedule Accessible: Schedules work best when children can easily see and interact with them throughout the day.

Try this: Place schedules on the refrigerator, bedroom wall, or inside a folder your child carries between settings.

4

Pair Visuals With Verbal Cues: Visual schedules are strongest when paired with calm, consistent language.

Try this: Point to the schedule while saying, “First dinner, then outside,” rather than relying only on verbal reminders.

5

Allow Flexibility: Sometimes routines change — and that’s okay. Visual schedules can also help children practice flexibility.

Try this: Use a “surprise” icon or “change of plans” card occasionally to prepare your child for small adjustments.

NEWSLETTER



TO
CHECK
OUT

These resources help families better understand how visual supports can reduce stress and increase independence.

Visual Supports
for People with
Autism: by
Marlene Cohen
& Peter Gerhardt

The New Social
Story Book: by
Carol Gray

The Out-of-
Sync Child:
by Carol
Kranowitz

Schedules and
Visual Supports:
by Jennifer
Stallings



REAL SUCCESS
STORIES FROM
OUR BCBAS

Triumph's Triumphs:

When Mikey first started ABA, it was really hard for him to communicate. He wasn't using words—he'd cry, pull his mom over, or just get really frustrated when he needed something. You could see he wanted to communicate, but he just didn't have the tools yet.

I remember how tough mealtimes were. His mom was constantly trying to figure out, is he hungry? does he want something else?, and Mikey just couldn't tell her.

We started really small. Just one picture, one word. At first, he'd hand over a card for "juice." And then one day, after so much practice, he actually said it, "juice."

It sounds like such a small thing, but it was huge.

From there, things slowly started to change. He picked up more words, started labeling things he liked, and you could just see the frustration melting away because people finally understood him. And then one day, completely out of nowhere, he looked at his mom and said, "I love you."

I don't think anyone in the room had dry eyes. It wasn't just about talking, it was about him finally being able to connect.

Chaim's father really wanted to be able to take him to shul and sit with him, even just for a little. But it felt almost impossible at first. Chaim couldn't sit for more than a minute or two, the environment was just too overwhelming for him- too loud, too colorful and definitely too sqishy. Most weeks, his father would end up stepping outside with him.

You could tell how much that meant to his dad... he just wanted that shared experience.

So, we started working on it in a really gradual way. Sitting for 30 seconds at home. Then a minute. Then a little longer. We added supports, kept it positive, and really celebrated every tiny step.

Eventually, they started trying it in shul, but very slowly. First, just being near the room. Then going in for a minute or two. No pressure, just building it up over time.

And then one Shabbos morning, something really special happened. Chaim sat next to his father for a good part of davening. Calm, settled, just... there with him.

His father told me afterward that he honestly never thought that moment would come.

It wasn't really about sitting through shul, it was about being able to share that time together, something that once felt so out of reach.

Quote of the month:

**Children
thrive when
they know
what to
expect.**

- Dr. Temple Grandin

