

Using a Visual Schedule Tip Sheet



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What is a Visual Schedule?

Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other related disorders benefit from having a visual representation for a sequence of events throughout the day or for a specific activity. A visual schedule that communicates the order or a series of activities or steps required to complete a specific activity. Visuals schedules help to decrease anxiety by showing a predictable sequence of events and making expectations clear for experiences such as school, washing hands, going to the doctor, and visiting Cheekwood Botanical Gardens. A visual schedule can include objects, line drawings, pictures/photographs, or words.

Schedules have had significant research showing the effectiveness of their use to be considered an established treatment for children with ASD. For more information about evidence-based treatments, go to The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders at <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/>.

How Can I Use It to Help my Child when Visiting Cheekwood?

Visual Schedule Creation Kits can be checked-out from the Visitors Services desk. They include a template to sequence stops and activities according to you and your child's preference. Create the order of your visit interspersing preferred and non-preferred task so your child remains motivated to follow the schedule.

When transitioning to a new activity ask your child, "What's next?" After your child responds by answering verbally or pointing to the next activity on the schedule, immediately transition to the new activity providing reinforcement for moving on appropriately. Reinforcement can include back rubs, verbal praise, tickles, etc. It is best to use the schedule as consistent as possible and not to re-arrange the schedule during your visit, especially during your child's first experiences using a schedule.

Tips for Using a Visual Schedule

- Only the child should manipulate the schedule cards. Adults should use hand-over-hand prompting so that only the child touches the schedule.
- Reward the child for following his/her schedule appropriately. Rewards can be delivered while following the schedule (back rubs, small snack, etc.) and when arriving at the correct location (verbal praise, tickles, preferred toy/snack, etc.).
- Intersperse preferred activities with less preferred activities. Following a schedule should not be a punishing activity for the child.
- Begin by using the same picture consistently to represent the same activity. For example, use only one building picture to represent "museum", only one table picture to represent "eating", and only one treehouse picture to represent "treehouse". You do not need separate pictures of every activity that falls in the same category.
- A variety of techniques can be used to make schedule cards. Some children respond better to photos (digital, 35mm, or Polaroid), some respond to pictures (e.g., PictureThis CD [www.silverliningmm.com]), some prefer line drawings (e.g., Mayer-Johnson), and others respond best to actual objects.