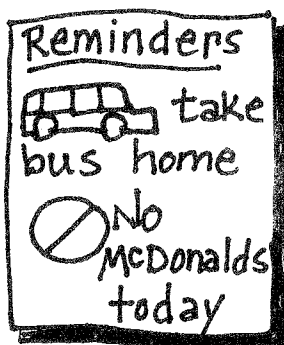
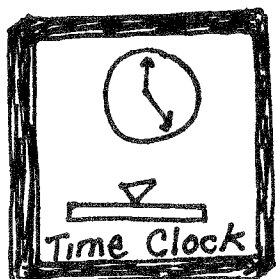


USING VISUAL SUPPORTS TO IMPROVE WORK SKILLS AND REDUCE UNWANTED BEHAVIOR ON THE JOB

<u>Schedule</u>	
8:00	Coffee time
9:00	Work table
10:00	Clean break room
11:00	sweep hall
12:00	eat lunch



**A RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT
INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

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This document was written and illustrated by **Kari Dunn Buron**, M.S., an Autism Resource Specialist with I.S.D. #916 and the Minnesota Autism Network. It is designed to assist secondary school and adult service staff in creating work environments that effectively support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The author would like to acknowledge the training and resources that contributed to this effort, including the work of Brenda Smith Myles, University of Kansas; Gary Mesibov and colleagues, Project TEACCH; and Linda Hodgdon, Troy, Michigan.

For purposes of this document, the masculine pronoun was used throughout.

Using Visual Supports to Improve Work Skills and Reduce Unwanted Behavior on the Job

Purpose

This pamphlet is meant to assist secondary school and adult service staff in creating work environments that effectively support individuals with autism.

Individuals with autism require high levels of visual structure to understand expectations on the job. When expectations are unclear, it is likely that the person with autism will become anxious. This anxiety can lead to disruptive and even aggressive behavior. Without clear visual cues, the person may not fully understand what he is to do, how much he is supposed to do, how he will know when he is finished, and what comes next (Structured Teaching, Project TEACCH). This can occur even for the verbal person with autism.

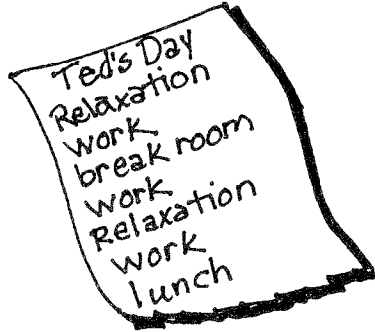
Most of us use visual structure of some sort to keep track of appointments, meetings, birthdays, etc. Individuals with autism have an even greater need for visual supports to remember, understand, and anticipate. Some examples of visual structure include schedules, calendars, task lists, lunch menus, choice boards, work schedules, and break room rules. Visual cues give information or directions to the person. Visual cues can structure and organize the environ-

Using Visual Supports

ment and consequently decrease the person's dependence on verbal cues from a coach or trainer.

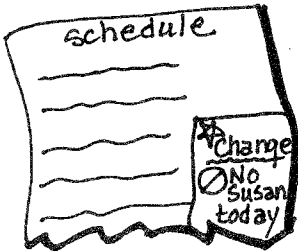
Visual Schedules

The person with autism may not be able to hold a sequence of events in his head. A visual schedule helps the person organize his day and predict the sequence of events. This can reduce the person's stress over what is going to happen next.

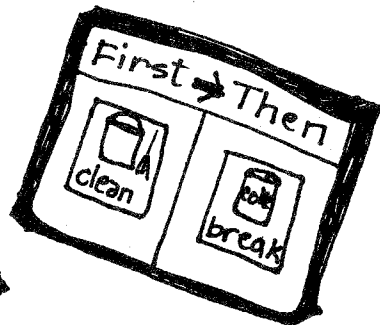
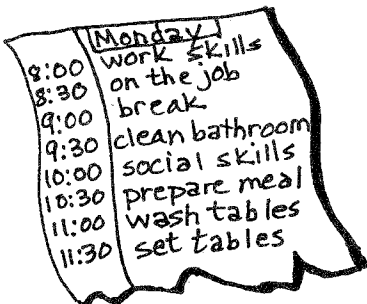


A schedule can also help when there is a change in the normal daily schedule. You can introduce

change to the person in a very understandable and systematic way.



Schedules can be very detailed, or they may cover only one hour at a time. The schedule's complexity should



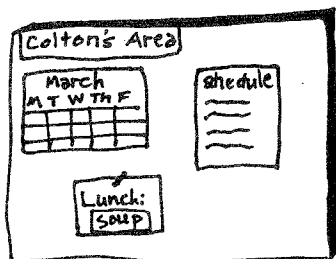
Using Visual Supports

depend on the person's ability to understand and use it.

Calendars

Calendars can help people with autism to understand long-range plans such as special days, a day off, or different days for different job assignments.

M	T	W	Th	F
1 YMCA	2	3	4 Com Center	5
8	9 NO work	10	11	12 YMCA
15 Com Center	16	17	18 NO work	19



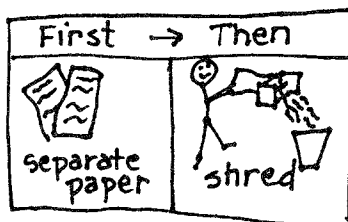
Calendars and other personal supports should be posted in a specific place so that the person learns to check that area to get information.



Task Lists

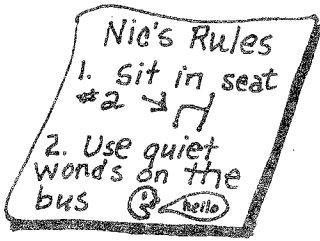
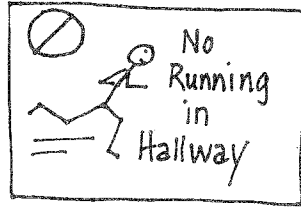
Visual task lists can make it easier for the person with autism to understand how much he has to do. Task lists should be concrete and easy to understand.

Visual task lists may be detailed or they may simply indicate that first you do this and then you do that.



Rules

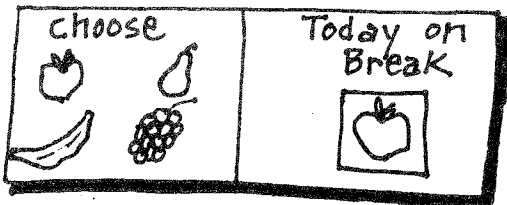
Rules change from one environment to another. What is okay to say or do at home may be very inappropriate for work. This can be confusing for a person with autism. Posting rules in particular places helps to remind the person of rules for that space.



Individuals with autism don't necessarily understand the whys of rules and consequently may need the rules to be very clear and concrete.

Structured Choice

Being able to make choices is important for all people. Individuals with autism may find open-ended choices too difficult and stressful. This is most obvious when given free time. If choice time, free time, or break time has no structure to it, it may cause problems for the person with autism. Offering two or three specific choices can help to structure this time.

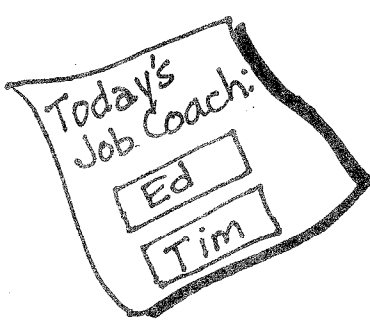


Communicating Other Important Information

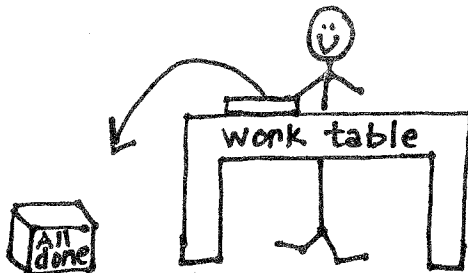
Individuals with autism may have strong or obsessional interests. This is part of the disorder of autism.

Using Visual Supports

Visual information can help to relieve stress caused from a person's perseverative thinking about such interests. For example, food may be an interest and the person may need to know what the menu indicates for lunch. If the menu isn't posted, the person may not be able to concentrate on work because he is able to think only about what he might be having for lunch. This can also be a problem if the worker assumes one thing will be for lunch and, when lunch time arrives, it is different than anticipated.

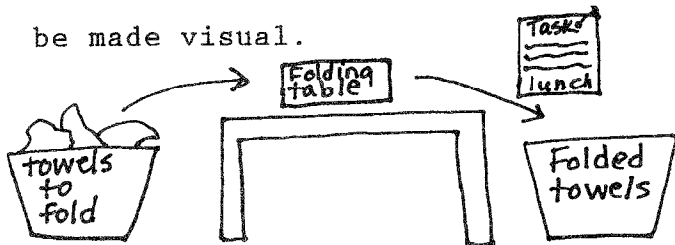


Highlighting places to put finished work can be helpful for achieving independence. This involves making such information obvious visually. It may take the form of a finished box or a basket near the person's work area.



Using Visual Supports

When setting up the person's work area, any information the person needs to have to complete the job independently should be made visual. If the



worker experiences high levels of anxiety, ask yourself if he clearly and visually understands what he is supposed to do, how much he is supposed to do, how he will know when he is finished, and what comes next.

Other Helpful Tips

1. Changes in routine can cause an enormous amount of stress for the person with autism. Always let the worker know in a visual and systematic way when there are going to be major changes.
2. Noise, movement, or lighting in the workplace can cause the worker added stress. When investigating an unwanted behavior, always consider the levels of stimulation and confusion in the work environment.
3. Too much free time can cause the person with autism to become highly agitated or sometimes more withdrawn.

Using Visual Supports

4. The task itself may be too difficult for the person. A rule of thumb is that if you want the person to do a task independently, it should be easy enough for him to do on a bad day.
5. Beware of talking too much to the person with autism. Processing language can be difficult for the person and repeated verbal prompting can cause stress as well as dependence.
6. People with autism have problems with expressive language, including nonverbal language. For example, the person may laugh when you are angry with him. It is important not to personalize behavior.
7. It is often good to have a relaxing place for the person to take a break (dim lights, Walkman with preferred music, etc.) rather than having him take a break in a highly social environment.
8. People with autism learn in routines. Teaching them new skills within a teaching routine is an excellent strategy. For example, every time you teach something new it may be at a particular table, or the task list may be on a particular color of paper. Use a visual cue to let the person know that this will be something new.
9. Start the day with a consistent and relaxing routine to help the worker relax in the work environment. For example, every morning have a cup of coffee and watch the weather channel for 15 minutes.

Using Visual Supports

10. It is important to recognize signs of stress in the person with whom you work. When early signs appear, realize that something is causing the person stress and that your job is to limit the frustration. Realize that if the person is pushed at this point, he is likely to explode. No power struggle is worth someone getting hurt. If the person becomes obviously upset stop talking. This is a very powerful tool and can help everybody calm down in a rough situation. It is never a good idea to try to physically force someone to move when he is highly anxious.

RESOURCES

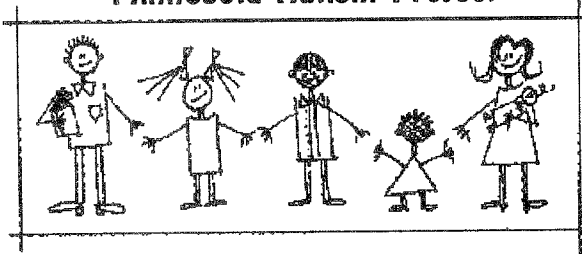
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Minnesota Autism Project



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