Visual Supports:
Simple, yet powerful strategies for home.

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We all use visual supports in one fashion or another to either communicate or simply remind ourselves of things we need to do. Whether it's a sticky note on our car dashboard that says, "Buy more bread" on the way home from work or an intricate, custom-made token system depicting what our child may earn for good behavior, the bottom line is they work. That's why we keep using them and why they've been the subject of hundreds of studies over the recent years. What is a visual support? It's basically a picture, word, or other item used to better communicate something- simple right? They are used in every aspect of life, from school, employment, community, and of course at home! Let's take a look at a variety of visuals ranging in applicability and complexity, and provide you with some ideas to support your child, regardless of ability or age:

First, Then

The "First...Then" method is a very simple way to objectively communicate a contingency or expectation. It is often used with younger children or those who have early language abilities to increase compliance with instructions.
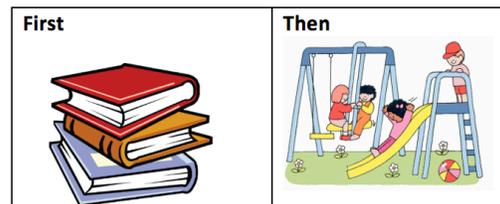
Pairing what can be earned after completing a usually non-preferred task with a visual can often increase effectiveness.

> Visual supports provide a quick and easy way to increase communication and follow-through.

Visual Schedule

A visual schedule can be highly effective in a variety of settings and often used with younger children or those with early language abilities. We know that for many learners, pairing a verbal instruction with a picture can better communicate the routine (using actual photos is a great way to take this to the next level). Also, it helps the learner anticipate what may be coming later in the day to reduce anxiety around transitions. Integrating choice, i.e., allowing your child to make the

schedule or pick the order of (a few) events, is an additional strategy that is recommended to increase your child's sense of control and often helps reduce

behavior challenges. Stringing several preferred activities together can also be a great way to increase your child's independence in leisure activities and decrease the need for you to help them "find something to do."

Token System

Ah, the good ol' token system- an effective behavioral approach whereby much of its success is attributed to its visual nature. This is a great strategy for helping a child see how close they are to earning something (e.g., 5 chores = video game time with Dad) as well as a common reminder of appropriate behavior. It's objective, clear, and easy to implement. Picking the appropriate number of tasks and a commensurate reinforcer is important to the overall effectiveness.

Task Analysis

A task analysis is a formal name for a breakdown of steps in an activity, such as emptying a dishwasher or brushing teeth. These visuals help convey the steps in a simple way and promote independence so parents can fade out their prompting. Task analyses are used in schools, on the job, at home, and even when attempting to build an intricate Lego structure (or furniture from a box for that matter)!

Timers

Timers are used widely by children and adults of all ability levels. They help keep us organized, on task, and give us a clear visual of either how much time has passed or how much time we have left. If your child cannot read a clock, a sand timer or one that shows the time elapsing in another color are excellent choices. Using a timer can be a great strategy to add for learners with difficulties with various executive functioning skills such as starting/stopping activities or staying on task.

Checklists

Checklists are one of the most common and widely used visual supports but especially helpful for learners who have difficulty with planning, memory, or organization. They can be used with pictures for younger learners or those with early language abilities, on a phone, or even on scratch paper at work to track a long list of "to-do's." Many parents use dry erase boards as a versatile method to help their children remember, log, and prioritize their own tasks with different colored markers, easy erasing, and repeated use.

Color Coding

Using a color coding system can be an easy way to not only keep files organized but also to prioritize tasks. Many adults with disabilities or who are working on executive functioning skills in the workforce utilize this as an accommodation to be successful in completing tasks independently. This can easily transfer to the home environment and especially helpful when prioritizing homework, strategizing when to work on each school project, and planning for tests. Pairing color coding with a visual calendar on a dry erase board can be an easy but effective combination.

Those were just a few examples of the many ways you can facilitate independence, communication, organization, and prioritization with simple visual supports. Are you using some with your child? Try some out today in your home! And as always, Rethink is here to help. Sign up for your free teleconsultations with our clinicians and let us help you create visuals to support your child today at www.rethinkbenefits.com