



Autism Focused Intervention  
Resources & Modules



## EBP BRIEF PACKET: VISUAL SUPPORTS

UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute  
Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules  
Sam, A., & AFIRM Team, Updated 2024



FRANK PORTER GRAHAM  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



# OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

- 1. Table of VS Contents:** This list details the specific VS resources that apply to Visual Supports.
- 2. What is VS:** A quick summary of salient features of Visual Supports, including what it is, who it can be used with, what skills it has been used with, and settings for instruction.
- 3. Evidence-base:** The evidence-base details the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP) criteria for inclusion as an evidence-based practice and the specific studies that meet the criteria for Visual Supports.
- 4. Planning Checklist:** This checklist details the steps for planning for Visual Supports, including what prerequisite learning of practices are needed, collecting baseline data of the interfering behavior if needed, and what materials/resources are needed.
- 5. Other Resources:** Other resources may include decision trees, checklists, and/or template forms that will support the use of Visual Supports.
- 6. Step-by-Step Guide:** Use this guide as an outline for how to plan for, use, and monitor Visual Supports. Each step includes a brief description as a helpful reminder while learning the process.
- 7. Implementation Checklist:** Use this checklist to determine if Visual Supports are being implemented as intended.
- 8. Monitoring Progress Checklist:** Use this form as a method for collecting and analyzing data to determine if the learner on the spectrum is making progress towards the interfering behavior.
- 9. Tip Sheet for Professionals:** Use this tip sheet, intended for professionals working with learners on the spectrum, as a supplemental resource to help provide basic information about Visual Supports.
- 10. Parent Guide:** Use this guide intended for parents or family members of learners on the spectrum to help them understand basic information about Visual Supports and how it is being used with their child.
- 11. Additional Resources:** This list provides additional information for learning more about Visual Supports as well as resources.
- 12. CEC Standards:** This list details the specific CEC standards that apply to Visual Supports.
- 13. Glossary:** This glossary contains key terms that apply specifically to Visual Supports.
- 14. References:** This list details the specific references used for developing this VS module in numerical order.



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# VISUAL SUPPORTS

## WHAT IS VS?

Visual supports are concrete cues that are paired with, or used in place of, a verbal cue to provide the learner with information about a routine, activity, behavioral expectation, or skill demonstration.<sup>4</sup> Visual supports might include: pictures, written words, objects, arrangement of the environment, visual boundaries, schedules, maps, labels, organization systems, timelines, and scripts.

Individual types of visual supports might not have been shown to be as effective for learners.<sup>4</sup> For example, graphic organizers do not have as strong of evidence-base as individual visual schedules.

The various types of visual supports can be divided into three categories: visual boundaries, visual cues, and visual schedules. The table provides an overview of the three categories, samples of the types of visual supports associated with each category, a definition of the type, and how the visual support might be used to address a skill or behavior.

## EVIDENCE-BASE:

Based upon the 2020 systematic review conducted by the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP), Visual Supports is a focused intervention that meets evidence-based practice criteria with 104 single case design and 2 group design studies. Visual Supports has been effective for early intervention (0-2), preschoolers (3-5 years), elementary school learners (6-11 years), middle school learners (12-14 years), high schoolers (15-18 years), and young adults (19-22 years) on the spectrum. Studies included in the 2020 EBP report (Steinbrenner et al., 2020) detail how Visual Supports can be used to effectively address the following outcomes for a target skill/goal/behavior: academic, adaptive/self-help, behavior, communication, joint attention, motor, play, school readiness, social, and vocational.

## HOW IS VS BEING USED?

Visual Supports can be used by a variety of professionals, including teachers, special educators, therapists, paraprofessionals, and early interventionists in educational and community-based environments. Parents and family members also can use Visual Supports in the home.

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# EVIDENCE-BASE

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice has adopted the following criteria to determine if a practice is evidence-based. The 2020 EBP report (Steinbrenner et al., 2020) provides more information about the systematic review process.

Efficacy must be established through high-quality, peer-reviewed research in scientific journals using:

- At least 2 randomized or quasi-experimental group design studies, or
- At least 5 single subject/case design studies, or a
- Combination of evidence of 1 randomized or quasi-experimental group design study and 3 single subject/case design studies

## OVERVIEW:

Based upon the 2020 systematic review conducted by the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP), Visual Supports is a focused intervention that meets evidence-based practice criteria with 104 single case design and 2 group design studies. Visual Supports has been effective for early intervention (0-2), preschoolers (3-5 years), elementary school learners (6-11 years), middle school learners (12-14 years), high schoolers (15-18 years), and young adults (19-22 years) on the spectrum. Studies included in the 2020 EBP report (Steinbrenner et al., 2020) detail how Visual Supports can be used to effectively address the following outcomes for a target skill/goal/behavior: academic, adaptive/self-help, behavior, communication, joint attention, motor, play, school readiness, social, and vocational.

In the table below, the instructional outcomes identified by the evidence base are shown by age of participants.

Age	Academic	Adaptive	Behavior	Communication	Joint Attention	Motor	Play	School readiness	Social	Vocational
0-2		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
3-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
6-11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
12-14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	Yes
15-18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
19-22		Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes



## EARLY INTERVENTION (0-2 YEARS):

Miller, S. A., Rodriguez, N. M., & Rourke, A. J. (2015). Do mirrors facilitate acquisition of motor imitation in children diagnosed with autism? *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 48*(1), 194-8.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.187>

## PRESCHOOL (3-5 YEARS):

- Bennett, K., Reichow, B., & Wolery, M. (2011). Effects of structured teaching on the behavior of young children with disabilities. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 26*(3), 143-152.  
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## HIGH SCHOOL (15-18 YEARS):

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## YOUNG ADULTS (19-22 YEARS):

- \*Hughes, C., Golas, M., Cosgriff, J., Brigham, N., Edwards, C., & Cashen, K. (2011). Effects of a social skills intervention among high school students with intellectual disabilities and autism and their general education peers. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 36(1-2), 46-61. <https://doi.org/10.2511/rpsd.36.1-2.46>
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- Purrazzella, K., & Mechling, L. C. (2013). Evaluation of manual spelling, observational and incidental learning using computer-based instruction with a tablet PC, large screen projection, and a forward chaining procedure. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(2), 218-235.**
- \***Spriggs, A. D., Knight, V., & Sherrow, L. (2015). Talking picture schedules: Embedding video models into visual activity schedules to increase independence for students with ASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(12), 3846-61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-014-2315-3>**

Notes: \* denotes the study has participants in at least two age ranges  
**Bold denotes new studies since 2011 (2012 till 2017)**



# TYPES OF VISUAL SUPPORTS

## VISUAL BOUNDARIES:

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**Room arrangement** - a type of visual support that includes arranging the environment in a systematic way, including covering materials unnecessary for performing the skill with sheets

## VISUAL SCHEDULES:

---

**Classroom schedule** - a type of visual support that includes posting a class schedule in a central location available for all students.

**First/then schedule** - a type of visual support that includes the sequencing of two events to help a student understand what comes next.

**Individual schedule** - a type of visual support that includes visually presenting the learner's day.

## VISUAL CUES:

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**Choice boards** - a type of visual support that includes a visual representation of choices a learner can select

**Graphic organizers** - a type of visual support that includes a visual display, diagram, or outline for organizing concepts or ideas

**Labels** - a type of visual support that includes a visual representation to show where an item belongs

**Scripts** -

**Visual instructions** - a type of visual support that includes visually organizing an activity or task



# PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Skill/Goal/Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Complete this checklist to determine which type of visual support to use with the learner on the spectrum as well as if VS is ready to be implemented.

## VISUAL BOUNDARIES:

---

- Is there a safety concern?
- Does the learner have difficulty staying in one place?
- Does the learner know what they are to be working on in an area?
- Does the learner ever leave a location because of frustration?
- Does the learner ever have difficulty with entering others' workspace and/or making use of others' work or personal materials?

**If you checked off any of these questions, visual boundaries might be helpful to use with the learner.**

## VISUAL CUES:

---

- Does the activity, event, or concept cause frustration for the learner?
- Does the activity, event, or concept cause anxiety for the learner?
- Is adult support required for the learner to be successful with the activity, event, or concept?
- Is the activity, event, or concept difficult for the learner to understand when only verbal information is provided?

**If you checked off any of these questions, visual cues might be helpful to use with the learner.**



### VISUAL SCHEDULES:

---

- Does the learner struggle moving from one area to the next?
- Does the learner forget what s/he is asked to do next?
- Does the learner exhibit disruptive/inappropriate behavior when transitioning?

**If you checked off any of these questions, visual schedules might be helpful to use with the learner.**

### PLANNING:

---

- Has the target goal/behavior/skill been identified?
- Has baseline data and/or a functional behavior assessment been collected through direct observation of the learner?
- Is the target goal/behavior/skill measurable and observable? Does it clearly state **what** the target goal/behavior/skill is, **when** it will occur, and **how** team members/observers will know it has been mastered?
- Is Visual Supports appropriate for the learner’s target goal/behavior/skill?
- Does the learner have needed prerequisite skills/abilities?
- Does the learner require additional adaptations/modifications/supports? Such as a communication device?
- Have reinforcers/rewards for the learner been identified based on the learner’s interests/preferred items and/or activities?
- Are additional materials and/or resources for using Visual Supports ready and available?

### SELECT VISUAL SUPPORTS TYPE:

---

- Boundaries                       Cues                       Schedule

### SELECT ADDITIONAL EBPS:

---

- Prompting                       Reinforcement
- Modeling                       Other: \_\_\_\_\_



# FIRST/THEN BOARD

Learner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Target Goal/Behavior/Skill: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Use this template to create a first/then visual schedule.

First	Then



# CHANGE

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Goal/Behavior/Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use this template to teach flexibility or prepare learners for changes in daily schedules.

## Change Alert

**Instead of ...**

**We will be ...**



# CHOICE BOARD

Learner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Target Skill/Goal/Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use this template to create a Choice Board for the learner to select a desired or preferred object, activity, or food.

## \_\_\_\_\_ 's Choice Board

1

2

3



# MONITORING PROGRESS CHECKLIST

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Skill/Goal/Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Complete this checklist to determine if the learner is making progress with using Visual Supports.

## MONITORING PROGRESS:

- Is the target skill or behavior well defined?
- Is the skill or behavior measurable and observable?
- Has data been collected and analyzed?
- Is the skill or behavior too difficult for the learner?
- Was Visual Supports used with fidelity?
- Are there too many reinforcers?
- Are there too few reinforcers?
- Are all team members using Visual Supports in a consistent manner?
- Is Visual Supports occurring at a sufficient level to maintain the behavior or target skill?

## ANECDOTAL NOTES:



### COLLECT DATA:

Collect data on target behaviors. Be sure to include the level of support needed for each of the steps or tasks.

Steps/Tasks	Dates				
<b>Amount of time learner was ON-TASK or OFF-TASK (CIRCLE ONE)</b>					

**Prompt Key:** VB = Verbal; VSP = Prompt to use Visual Support; G = Gestural; M = Model; P = Physical; I = No prompts needed/Independent; IS = Independent with support (VS = Visual Support; VM = Video Modeling; SN = Social Narratives)

### SELECT REPRESENTATION & PRESENTATION:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Objects                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 item          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pictures                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 items         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing or Icons symbols | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-4 items       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Words/Phases             | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-7 items       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 or more items |



# STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

This step-by-step practice guide outlines how to plan for, use, and monitor Visual Supports.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

Each of the following points is important to address so that you can be sure Visual Supports is likely to address the target goal/behavior/skill of your learner on the spectrum.



## HAVE YOU FOUND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT...?

- Identifying the interfering behavior...?
- Collecting baseline data through direct observation...?
- Establishing a target goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target goal or outcome is, and how team members and/or observers will know when the skill is mastered...?

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'No,' review the process of how to select an appropriate EBP (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-EBP>).

For more information about Visual Supports, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

## STEP 1: PLANNING FOR VS

The planning step details the initial steps and considerations involved to prepare for using Visual Supports with a learner on the spectrum.

### 1. Identify visual supports needed to acquire or maintain target skills

To identify when visual supports should be used, think about activities and events that occur throughout the day and what behaviors or target skills you might want to address.

The **Visual Support Planning Checklist** found in the Resource section will help you determine the category of supports (visual boundaries, visual cues, or visual schedules) that would work best for the learner on the spectrum.

Keep in mind that the three **Visual Supports** types are:

- Boundaries
- Cues
- Schedules

While each category is slightly different, the practice guide is applicable to all. When unique features are tied to a specific category, we will identify them through examples or cautions.

## 2. Develop/prepare visual support for learner based on individualized assessments

Use assessments to develop and prepare the presentation of the visual support that will be most beneficial to the learner on the spectrum. This process is slightly different for each category of visual supports.

### • Visual Boundaries

- When creating boundaries, remember boundaries provide information about where a particular area in the classroom or at home begins or ends or what activities are completed in an area or setting.
- To create boundaries, use natural boundaries, objects, furniture, tape on the floor, or rugs to clearly designate the boundary area.

### • Visual Cues

- Visual cues include graphic organizers, visual instructions, labels, and choice boards.
- When preparing visual cues consider:
  - The information needed to be presented visually.
  - Form of representation (objects, photographs, drawing or picture symbols, words, phrases, or a combination of formats).

### • Visual Schedules

To create a visual schedule, consider the five core components of a schedule:

- **Form of representation:** functional objects, representational objects, photographs, drawings or picture symbols, words or phrases, or a combination
- **Length of the schedule:** One item, signifying upcoming transitions; Two items, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom; Three to four items, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom; Half-day, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom; Full day, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom; or Technology based schedule.
- **Method of manipulating the schedule:**
  - Learner on the spectrum carries an object that will be used in the upcoming activity,
  - Learner on the spectrum carries an object/visual cue that represents an upcoming area and then matches the object/visual cue to a pocket, basket, or envelope in the represented location,
  - Learner on the spectrum turns over the visual schedule cue or places the cue in a “finished” location when activity is completed, or
  - The learner on the spectrum marks of the visual cue on schedule as completed.
- **Location of the schedule:**
  - Schedule information brought to the learner,
  - A stationary schedule in a central location (on a wall, shelf, desk), or
  - A portable schedule that a learner on the spectrum can carry across locations (e.g., clipboard, notebook, handheld device).
- Determine the **method to initiate schedule** use and transitioning from one activity to the next
  - Staff bring schedule information to the learner on the spectrum or
  - The learner on the spectrum moves to the schedule using a visual transition cue.

### 3. Organize all needed materials

Before learners on the spectrum arrive, make sure visual boundaries are in place and all visual cues and schedules are ready.

## STEP 2: USING VS

This step details the process of implementing Visual Supports with a learner on the spectrum.

### 1. Teach learner on the spectrum how to use visual support

The process of teaching how to use a visual support varies based upon the category.

- **Visual Boundaries**
  - Introduce the learner on the spectrum to the established boundary and point out the important boundaries and tasks completed in that area.
  - Use modeling to teach the learner on the spectrum to stay within the boundary.
  - Use reinforcement when learner on the spectrum stays within a boundary.
  - Use corrective feedback when learner does not stay within the boundary.
- **Visual Cues**
  - Show the learner on the spectrum the developed visual cue.
  - Stand behind the learner when prompting the use of the visual cue in order to make sure the learner is looking at the visual information and not the adult.
  - Use concise, relevant words/terms while teaching the visual cue.
  - Assist learner in participating in the activity/event with the visual cue.
- **Visual Schedule**
  - Stand behind the learner on the spectrum when prompting use of the visual schedule.
  - Place schedule information in learner's hand.
  - Use concise, relevant words/terms (identify location where learner is transitioning).
  - Assist learner on the spectrum in getting to designated activity/location, and prompt learner to place schedule materials in appropriate location.
  - Ensure learner remains in scheduled location until prompted to use schedule to transition.
  - Repeat steps until learner on the spectrum is able to complete the sequence independently across activities/locations.

### 2. Fade prompts as quickly as possible when criterion met

By fading prompts quickly, adults will teach learner on the spectrum not to rely on adult prompts but rather use the visual supports independently.

### 3. Use visual support consistently and across settings

Make sure all adults working with the learner on the spectrum are consistent with expectations, reinforcement, correction, and follow-through regarding the use of visual supports.


## STEP 3: MONITORING VS

The following step details how to monitor the use of Visual Supports with a learner on the spectrum and how to determine next steps based on the data.

### 1. Collect and analyze data

It is important to continuously collect and review data with the VS team. Collect data on:

- setting of observation
- sensory experiences available in the setting by modality
- learner's response to sensory stimuli
- level of prompting needed for learner to participate in that sensory setting
- other VSs or strategies used to support the learner

 Use the **Monitoring Progress Checklist** to collect data and monitor learner progress toward VS goals.

### 2. Determine next steps based on learner progress

Collecting data will help team members decide about the effectiveness of using Visual Supports and whether the learner on the spectrum is making progress. If a learner is making progress based upon data collected, team members should continue to use the selected strategies.

If team members determine that the learner is not making progress, consider the following:

- Have team members received VS training or is additional training needed?
- Is the target goal/behavior/skill well defined?
- Is the target goal/behavior/skill measurable and observable?
- Has enough time been devoted to using Visual Supports (frequency, intensity, and/or duration)?
- Is the target goal/behavior/skill being targeted during appropriate routines and activities?
- Is VS appropriate or a 'good fit' for the target behavior?
- Are VS strategies addressing the target behavior?
- Does the learner need additional supports?
- Are the selected materials and activities intrinsically motivating for the learner?

If these issues have been addressed and the learner on the spectrum continues not to show progress, consider selecting a different evidence-based practice to use with the learner on the spectrum.



# IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST: VISUAL BOUNDARIES

## BEFORE YOU START, HAVE YOU...?

- Identifying the target goal/behavior/skill...?
- Collecting baseline data through direct observation...?
- Establishing a target goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target goal or outcome is, and how team members and/or observers will know when the skill is mastered...?

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'No,' review the process of how to select an appropriate EBP (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-EBP>).

		Observation:	1	2	3	4	5
		Date:					
		Observer's Initials:					
<b>STEP 1: PLANNING</b>							
1.1	Identify visual supports needed to acquire or maintain target skills						
1.2	Develop/prepare visual support for learner based on individualized assessments						
1.3	Organize all needed materials						
<b>STEP 2: USING</b>							
2.1	Teach learner how to use visual support						
2.1a	Introduce boundary to learner						
2.1b	Use modeling to teach learner to stay within boundary						
2.1c	Use reinforcement to encourage learner to stay within boundary						
2.1d	Use corrective feedback when learner does not stay within boundary						
2.2	Fade prompts as quickly as possible when criterion met						
2.3	Use visual support consistently and across settings						
<b>STEP 3: MONITORING</b>							
3.1	Collect data on target behaviors						
3.2	Determine next steps based on learner progress						



# IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST: VISUAL CUES

## BEFORE YOU START, HAVE YOU...?

- Identifying the target goal/behavior/skill...?
- Collecting baseline data through direct observation...?
- Establishing a target goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target goal or outcome is, and how team members and/or observers will know when the skill is mastered...?

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'No,' review the process of how to select an appropriate EBP (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-EBP>).

		Observation:	1	2	3	4	5
		Date:					
		Observer's Initials:					
<b>STEP 1: PLANNING</b>							
1.1	Identify visual supports needed to acquire or maintain target skills						
1.2	Develop/prepare visual support for learner based on individualized assessments						
1.3	Organize all needed materials						
<b>STEP 2: USING</b>							
2.1	Teach learner how to use visual support						
2.1a	Show learner visual cue						
2.1b	Stand behind learner when prompting use of visual cue						
2.1c	Use concise, relevant words/terms while teaching visual cue						
2.1d	Assist learner in participating in activity/event with visual cue						
2.2	Fade prompts as quickly as possible when criterion met						
2.3	Use visual support consistently and across settings						
<b>STEP 3: MONITORING</b>							
3.1	Collect data on target behaviors						
3.2	Determine next steps based on learner progress						



# IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST: VISUAL SCHEDULES

## BEFORE YOU START, HAVE YOU...?

- Identifying the target goal/behavior/skill...?
- Collecting baseline data through direct observation...?
- Establishing a target goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target goal or outcome is, and how team members and/or observers will know when the skill is mastered...?

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'No,' review the process of how to select an appropriate EBP (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-EBP>).

		Observation:	1	2	3	4	5
		Date:					
		Observer's Initials:					
STEP 1: PLANNING							
1.1	Identify visual supports needed to acquire or maintain target skills						
1.2	Develop/prepare visual support for learner based on individualized assessments						
1.3	Organize all needed materials						
STEP 2: USING							
2.1	Teach learner how to use visual support						
2.1a	Stand behind learner when prompting use of visual schedule						
2.1b	Place schedule information in learner's hand						
2.1c	Use concise, relevant words/terms						
2.1d	Assist learner in getting to designated activity/location, and prompt						
2.1e	Ensure learner remains in scheduled location until prompted to use						
2.1f	Repeat steps until learner is able to complete the sequence independently across activities/locations						
2.2	Fade prompts as quickly as possible when criterion met						
2.3	Use visual support consistently and across settings						
STEP 3: MONITORING							
3.1	Collect data on target behaviors						
3.2	Determine next steps based on learner progress						

# TIP SHEET FOR PROFESSIONALS

## VISUAL SUPPORTS ...

- Is a foundational evidence-based practice for children and youth on the spectrum from 0-22 years old that can be implemented in multiple settings.
- a group of specific interventions that minimize adult support while increasing the independence of learners on the spectrum . This practice includes visual boundaries, visual cues (graphic organizers, choice boards, and visual instructions) and visual schedules.



## WHY USE WITH LEARNERS ON THE SPECTRUM?

- Learners on the spectrum struggle with verbal instructions of what to do or what will happen next.
- Visual supports present information in a way that helps learners on the spectrum focus on key elements.
- Visual supports can increase on-task behavior and foster the independence of learners on the spectrum.

## INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES:

The evidence-base for Visual Supports supports its use to address the following outcomes, according to age range, in the table below:

- TIPS:**
- Consider target skills or behavior to determine which category of visual supports would best meet the needs of the learner.
  - Use a form of representation based upon individual assessments to visually present target skills or behavior.
  - Fade adult support to promote the independence of the learner.

Age	Academic	Adaptive	Behavior	Communication	Joint Attention	Motor	Play	School readiness	Social	Vocational
0-2		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
3-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
6-11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
12-14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	Yes
15-18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
19-22		Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes



## STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING:

### 1. PLAN

- Develop/prepare visual support for learner based on individualized assessments
- Organize all needed materials

### 2. USE

- Teach learner how to use visual support
- Fade prompts as quickly as possible when criterion met
- Use visual support consistently and across settings

### 3. MONITOR

- Collect and analyze
- Determine next steps based on learner progress



### Visual Supports VS

This sheet was designed as a supplemental resource to provide basic information about Visual Supports for professionals working with learners on the spectrum.

For more information about this selected evidence-based practice, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

# PARENT'S GUIDE

## WHAT IS VS?

- Visual Supports is a foundational evidence-based practice for children and youth on the spectrum from 0-22 years old.
- Visual supports provide key information in the form of objects, photographs, drawing, or print to help learners on the spectrum.
- Visual boundaries (visually defining a space where an activity occurs), visual cues (graphic organizers and visual instructions), and visual schedules are types of visual supports.



## WHY USE THIS VS WITH MY CHILD?

- Visual supports provide expectations for the learner, increase on-task behavior, and promote independence.
- Research studies have shown that Visual Supports has been used effectively with many age groups to achieve outcomes in the following areas: academic, adaptive/self-help, behavior, communication, joint attention, motor, play, school readiness, social, and vocational.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO AT HOME?

- Develop a schedule for a routine (such as going to bed or getting ready for school) or an activity (such as taking a shower or going to the bathroom) using pictures, words, or an app.
- Take pictures of your child's favorite activities and then place on a board. Your child can select an activity from the choice board.
- Several apps are available to help create visual supports

### Visual Supports VS

This parent introduction to VS was designed as a supplemental resource to help answer questions about Visual Supports.

To find out more about how this VS is being used with your child, please talk with:

For more information about this selected evidence-based practice, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## APPS:

Icon	Developer	Name	Available	Pricing
	AssistiveWare	<i>Pictello</i>	iPhone iPad	\$19.99
	Handhold Adaptive, LLC	<i>iPrompts</i>	Android iPhone iPad	Starts at \$9.99
	Bee Visual, LLC	<i>Choiceworks</i>	iPhone iPad	\$11.99
	Good Karma Applications, Inc.	<i>First Then Visual Schedule HD</i>	iPhone iPad	\$14.99

## BOOKS:

Cohen, M., & Sloan, D. (2016). *Visual supports for people with autism: A guide for parents and professionals*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

## WEBSITES:

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# CEC STANDARDS

## INITIAL PRACTICE-BASED STANDARDS FOR EARLY INTERVENTIONISTS/EARLY CHILDHOOD (0-5 YEARS; CEC, 2020)

### Standard 1: Child Development & Early Learning

- 1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the impact that different theories and philosophies of early learning and development have on assessment, curriculum, intervention, and instruction decisions.
- 1.4 Demonstrate an understanding of characteristics, etiologies, and individual differences within and across the range of abilities, including developmental delays and disabilities, their potential impact on children's early development and learning, and implications for assessment, curriculum, instruction, and intervention.

### Standard 6: Using Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions, Interventions, and Instruction

- 6.3 Engage in ongoing planning and use flexible and embedded instructional and environmental arrangements and appropriate materials to support the use of interactions, interventions, and instruction addressing developmental and academic content domains, which are adapted to meet the needs of each and every child and their family.
- 6.6 Use responsive interactions, interventions, and instruction with sufficient intensity and types of support across activities, routines, and environments to promote child learning and development and facilitate access, participation, and engagement in natural environments and inclusive settings.
- 6.7 Plan for, adapt, and improve approaches to interactions, interventions, and instruction based on multiple sources of data across a range of natural environments and inclusive settings.

## INITIAL PRACTICE-BASED STANDARDS FOR (GRADES K-12; CEC, 2020):

### Standard 5: Supporting Learning Using Effective Instruction

- 5.1 Use findings from multiple assessments, including student self-assessment, which are responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity and specialized as needed, to identify what students know and are able to do. They then interpret the assessment data to appropriately plan and guide instruction to meet rigorous academic and non-academic content and goals for each individual.
- 5.2 Use effective strategies to promote active student engagement, increase student motivation, increase opportunities to respond, and enhance self-regulation of student learning.
- 5.3 Use explicit, systematic instruction to teach content, strategies, and skills to make clear what a learner needs to do or think about while learning.
- 5.6 Plan and deliver specialized, individualized instruction that is used to meet the learning needs of each individual.



## Standard 6: Supporting Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Growth

- 6.1 Use effective routines and procedures to create safe, caring, respectful, and productive learning environments for individuals with exceptionalities.
- 6.2 Use a range of preventive and responsive practices documented as effective to support individuals' social, emotional, and educational well-being.
- 6.3 Systematically use data from a variety of sources to identify the purpose or function served by problem behavior to plan, implement, and evaluate behavioral interventions and social skills programs, including generalization to other environments.

## ADVANCED PRACTICE-BASED STANDARDS (CEC, 2012):

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### Standard 3: Programs, Services, and Outcomes

- 3.1 Design and implement evaluation activities to improve programs, supports, and services for individuals with exceptionalities.
- 3.2 Use understanding of cultural, social, and economic diversity and individual learner differences to inform the development and improvement of programs, supports, and services for individuals with exceptionalities.
- 3.3 Apply knowledge of theories, evidence-based practices, and relevant laws to advocate for programs, supports, and services for individuals with exceptionalities.



# GLOSSARY

**Baseline** - information gathered from multiple sources to better understand the target behavior, before using an intervention or practice

**Baseline data** - data collected on current performance level prior to implementation of intervention

**Choice boards** - a type of visual support that includes a visual representation of choices a learner can select.

**Classroom schedule** - a type of visual support that includes posting a class schedule in a central location available for all students.

**Direct training for target student and peer** - a type of peer-mediated instruction and intervention that trains peers and learner on the spectrum specific target skills.

**First/then schedule** - a type of visual support that includes the sequencing of two events to help a student understand what comes next.

**Frequency data** - used to measure how often the learner on the spectrum engages in the target skill or behavior.

**Graphic organizers** - a type of visual support that includes a visual display, diagram, or outline for organizing concepts or ideas.

**Individual schedule** - a type of visual support that includes visually presenting the learner's day.

**Individualized Intervention** - an intervention that is planned and implemented in a way specific to the learner receiving the intervention

**Labels** - a type of visual support that includes a visual representation to show where an item belongs.

**Positive reinforcement** - refers to the presentation of a reinforcer after a learner uses a target skill/behavior, therefore encouraging him/her to perform that behavior again.

**Prompt** - any help provided that will assist the learner in using specific skills. Prompts can be verbal, gestural, or physical.

**Room arrangement** - type of visual support that includes arranging the environment in a systematic way.

**Target behavior** - the behavior or skill that is the focus of the intervention. Behavior may need to be increased or decreased.

**Team members** - includes the parents, other primary caregivers, IEP/IFSP team members, teachers, therapists, early intervention providers, and other professionals involved in providing services for the learner on the spectrum.

**Verbal prompts** - includes any verbal assistance provided to learners to help them use a target skill correctly. Verbal cues range in intensity level from least to most restrictive.



**Visual boundaries** - a type of visual support that includes covering materials unnecessary for performing the skill.

**Visual instructions** - a type of visual support that includes visually organizing an activity or task.

**Visual prompt** - pictorial or object cues that provide learners with information about how to use the target skill or behavior.

**Visual supports** - visual supports are concrete cues that are paired with, or used in place of, a verbal cue to provide the learner with information about a routine, activity, behavioral expectation, or skill demonstration.



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