Tips for Creating Visual Schedules

Visual schedules can help children anticipate changes and/or provide them structure around behavioral and academic expectations.

Define the time Frame

The visual schedule should be tailored to the student's needs. When creating a visual schedule, it is not always necessary to create a visual schedule for the entire school day with each component listed. Think about what the child's triggers are and when the triggers are likely to occur. For instance, a child may be triggered when music class is cancelled because the teacher is absent. In this case, the visual schedule should include the blocks of time when changes are most likely to occur. Visual schedules are also helpful for students who have difficulty remembering routines. For these students, the visual schedule may only encompass different events in a single class or hour.

Use Removable Adhesive Products

While visual schedules help students adjust to changes or learn class structures, it is not possible to always stick to the same schedule every day. Instead of creating a new schedule each time a change occurs, consider attaching each picture or descriptor to a board with removable adhesives such as Velcro. This way it will be easy to create a modified visual schedule within seconds.

Limit Verbal Information

Visual schedules are helpful for children who have weaknesses in verbal or language processing. If the visual schedule contains a many words or only words, it will likely not be a useful tool for the children, as it will be too effortful to process the information. Visual schedule should contain as little verbal information as possible. Choose picture that represent the task or event and make sure the children understand the representation. Some children may prefer to see pictures of themselves on the schedule; however, make sure consent is obtain from their parents prior to taking any photos.

Limit the Number of Items

Focus on the goal of the visual schedule. If the goal is to reduce challenging behaviors around a specific event, avoid reminders of behaviors and events. Similarly, if the goal is to teach a child a routine in a specific class, avoid information about how the child can earn incentives. The visual schedule should be simple and easy to understand. Token economies and other contingency plans can be used to reinforce desirable behaviors as a result of using a visual schedule, but those should be tracked separately and do not belong on the visual schedule.