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Help Kids Learn Routines With Visual Schedules Speech & Language Development in the Early Years

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As parents, teachers, or therapists of children with language disorders or disabilities, it is easy to understand the importance of maintaining a daily routine. This allows the child to participate in a number of scheduled activities while decreasing the feeling of unfamiliarity or stress sometimes involved with change. It is important to teach the child these routines and to do this at a young age to allow carryover into the classroom setting.

Routines in the Home

Developing routines in the home prepares a child for school and promotes a sense of security. Even if your child does not have a diagnosis such as a language disorder or autism, using visual aids to reinforce daily routines can be beneficial. Since a child understands long before he/she can express himself, using visual aids allows a child to make choices at an early age.



- Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, and Snacks:** Keeping a child on a routine for meals helps to establish a sense of order and aids in digestion. Try not to change meal times frequently and try to give snacks at the same time each day. If your child needs visual reinforcement, make a large schedule from poster board and use Velcro® to attach pictures for meals and snacks. If the time changes, be sure to move the picture and discuss the change with the child.



- Bedtime and Naptime:** Keeping a child on a schedule will make these (sometimes trying) times easier on both you and your child. Incorporate pictures for each onto the timeline. If you need to change these times, be sure to move the picture on the schedule and discuss the change with the child.



- Play and Screen Time:** Use pictures to represent your child's favorite activities, toys, or television programs. Limit screen time based on your child's age and/or developmental level.



- Homework:** When a child reaches school age, visually scheduling in homework will help a child adjust to this task. Schedule a time when both you and your child have the time to work together to solve problems.

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Routines at School

If your child's teacher doesn't incorporate a visual routine, you can supplement your schedule to include the school week or make an additional schedule out of different color poster board. If the child relies on or enjoys looking at the schedule each day, then an easily carried, notebook-sized schedule could work well for the child.

The way to effectively do this is to work closely with the teacher and get a class schedule, including any special events like class pictures, assemblies, or field trips. You should include any disruption in the normal routine and discuss it with the child at the start of the school day. Use different pictures to illustrate each subject and/or activity, but don't change these pictures frequently. Using the same picture every time helps promote a sense of stability and familiarity for the child.

Many children don't need visual schedules to help them throughout the day. Some children, however, benefit from the visual reinforcement and the announcement of any expected changes in the daily routine.



- **Weekend Changes:** Weekends are full of activities that will change the child's schedule. It is important to prepare the child for these changes. One way to do this is to change the color of the scheduling board (i.e., change from white to colored poster board). Just like during the week, change the pictures to closely resemble the day's activities. Incorporate in trips, visits, and bedtime changes.



- **Unexpected Events:** Of course things will happen that don't fall into the schedule! Handle these changes two ways. If you can change the schedule before the event, do so while explaining to the child what is going to happen. If this is not possible, change the schedule after the event. Explain the reason to the child, and talk about what changed from the original schedule.

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