

Visual Supports

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to go to a destination, but did not know where it was? Perhaps you used a GPS or looked for a road sign? Or have you written down an appointment on a calendar or added a reminder to your phone so that you won't forget? The GPS, road sign, calendar, and phone are examples of visual supports.

We all use visual supports each day; however, for our students with Autism, they are an essential tool. They provide a concrete and predictable way for autistic students to understand their environment and activities, promoting communication and independence!

Visual Supports are cues represented visually through words, pictures, icons, objects, or even colors that can be paired with or used in place of verbal cues.

- Visuals provide information about physical boundaries, routines, activities, expectations, or skills.
- As a proactive support, they can assist with communication, student engagement in learning, social interaction, and prosocial behavior.
- Some are designed to benefit all, while others need to be individualized to address specific needs.
- They can be used as a standalone strategy or embedded in more complex interventions, such as [Antecedent-Based Intervention](#) (ABI), or combined with other practices, such as prompting and reinforcement.

● **Everyone can use and benefit from visual supports!**

Visual supports are often easy to implement with whatever resources you have on hand. Whether you're a teacher, parent, paraprofessional, or related service provider, incorporating visual supports into daily activities can enhance communication, organization, independence, and overall quality of life.

Visual Supports Help Students:

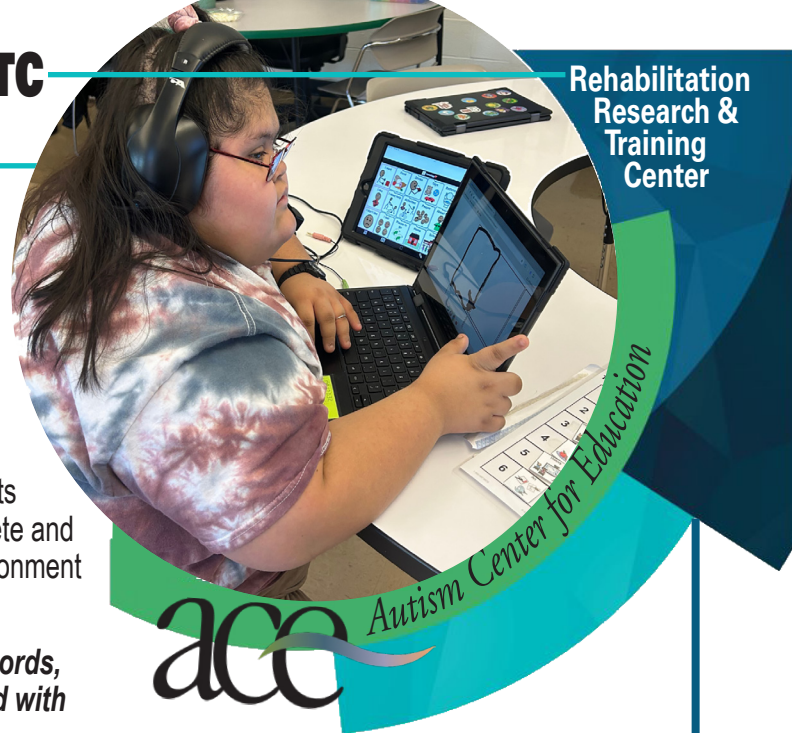
- Manage their daily schedule
- Complete classwork
- Learn a new routine or skill
- Understand boundaries and personal space
- Engage in academic learning
- Learn positive classroom expectations
- Practice social skills with peers
- Increase independence and self-determination

Visual Supports Help Staff:

- Manage their daily responsibilities in the classroom
- Communicate physical boundaries of an area or activity
- Build communication-rich environments
- Teach and reinforce positive expectations
- Support interactions with peers
- Provide choices throughout the day and within activities

Visual Supports Help Parents and Caregivers:

- Manage schedules at home and in the community
- Assist with transitions across settings and people
- Support communication at home to increase the quality of life
- Promote independence with activities of daily living
- Teach play and leisure activities
- Support friendships and inclusion



- **Types of Visual Supports** -- Visual supports can be simple to complex Visual supports can be simple to complex with low, mid, and high-tech options, depending on the needs of the individual and the context in which they are used.

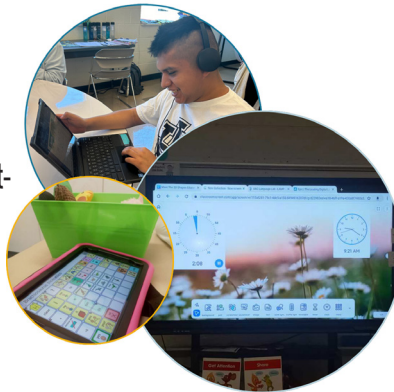
Low Tech -- Picture schedules, labels, and task analysis for arrival.



Mid Tech -- Checklist on tablet, phone alarms, core vocabulary projected on Smart Board, and digital timers.



High Tech -- Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, interactive whiteboards, and text-to-speech apps for reading.



Additional Resources: [Visual Supports Microlearning](#)
[Finding the Fuel for Learning & Emotional Well-Being - Social Emotional Engagement](#)
[Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules \(AFIRM\) Visual Supports Pre-Assessment](#)

References: [AFIRM - Selecting an Evidence-Based Practice \(EBP\)](#)
[AFIRM - Visual Supports \(VS\)](#)
[National Professional Development Center on Autism](#)

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For additional information, visit the ACE website:
vcuautismcenter.org

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