

# VISUAL SUPPORTS TIP SHEET

## WHAT ARE VISUAL SUPPORTS?

Visual Supports include a range of images including pictures or photographs, line drawings, schedules, lists, and graphic displays. Visual Supports give learners additional information, can reduce anxiety, clarify expectations, provide prompts, help individuals express their wants and needs, and can learners focus on a specific message in a direction. Visuals are an evidence-based practices for individuals with autism/autistic individuals (Wong et al., 2015) and



Head Start Center for Inclusion, 2021

## HOW DO VISUAL SUPPORTS PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE CLASSROOMS?

Visual supports are beneficial for all learners, but research has demonstrated they are especially useful for supporting individuals with disabilities and dual language learners. Researchers have studied visuals as a way to support play (Ganz & Flores, 2010), social interactions (Arthur-Kelly, Sigafos, Green, Mathisen, & Arthur-Kelly, 2009; Gauvreau, 2017), and support behavior (Gauvreau & Schwartz, 2013). Visual supports are a useful practice for young children with autism and related disabilities (Meadan, Ostrosky, Triplett, Michna, & Fettig, 2011; Wong et al., 2015) and dual language learners (Espinosa, 2013).



Visuals supportive inclusive and equitable classrooms by increasing accessibility for all learners, regardless of their communication style and home language. However, in order for visuals to be effective, we must *teach* learners how to use them.

## HOW CAN I USE VISUAL SUPPORTS IN MY PROGRAM?

1. Determine the function a visual support will serve. Consider how this might help a learner be more independent, better communicate their wants and needs,
2. Create the visual.
3. Teach the learner or learners how to use the visual independently, by modeling, providing feedback, and using reinforcement.
4. Embed the visual support within on-going activities and routines



5. Fade the visual support. This could include making the visual smaller, using text instead of pictures, or transferring the visual to a mobile device.
6. At each step in this process, collect and review data to determine if the visual is supporting the learner as intended.

## ONLINE RESOURCES FOR VISUAL SUPPORTS

There are several websites with free visuals available for download.

The Head Start Center for Inclusion web site provides a large catalog of downloadable visuals. These include social stories, voice volume charts, emotions, and a range of classroom visuals to support routines and activities in early learning programs. <http://headstartinclusion.org/classroom-visuals>

The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center provides numerous downloadable visual supports for classroom use. Visuals include meal talk, circle time supports, voice volume charts, visual schedules, and so forth. Note that these are the same visuals as on the Head Start Center for Inclusion web site. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/children-disabilities/article/classroom-visuals-supports>

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning provides a number of free, downloadable resources specifically for supporting social and emotional development for young children, including visuals such as emotion cards, emotion charts, and problem-solving steps. Many visuals are available in English and Spanish. <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#teachingskills>

### References

- Arthur-Kelly, M., Sigafoos, J., Green, V., Mathisen, B., & Arthur-Kelly, R. (2009). Issues in the use of visual supports to promote communication in individuals with autism spectrum disorder. *Disability and rehabilitation, 31*, 1474-1486.
- Espinosa, L. M. (2013). *Early education for dual language learners: Promoting school readiness and early school success*. National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, Migration Policy Institute.
- Ganz, J. B., & Flores, M. M. (2010). Supporting the play of preschoolers with autism spectrum disorders: Implementation of visual scripts. *Young Exceptional Children, 13*(2), 58-70.
- Gauvreau, A.N. (2017). Using "Snack Talk" to support social communication in inclusive preschool classrooms. *Young Exceptional Children, 22*(4), 187-197.
- Meadan, H., Ostrosky, M. M., Triplett, B., Michna, A., & Fettig, A. (2011). Using visual supports with young children with autism spectrum disorder. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 43*(6), 28-35.
- Wong, C., Odom, S. L., Hume, K. A., Cox, A. W., Fettig, A., Kucharczyk, S., ... & Schultz, T. R. (2015). Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with autism spectrum disorder: A comprehensive review. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders, 45*(7), 1951-1966.

