



## COMPANION GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Use the Companion Guide for Families to assist with using visual cues in your home.

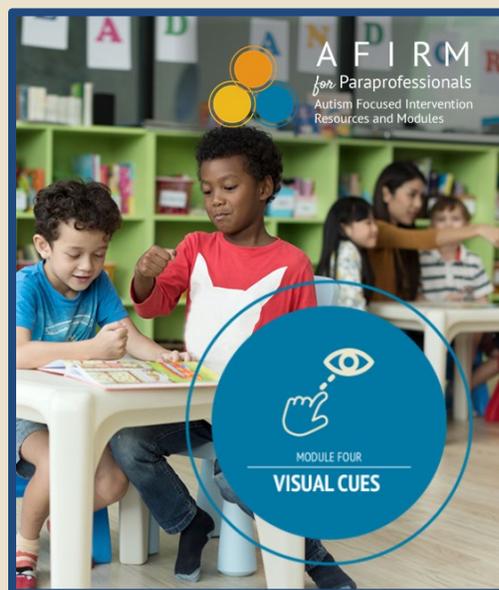
The AFIRM for Paras modules were developed for paraprofessionals at elementary schools. However, the practices outlined in the modules can be helpful for families to use at home and can be used with a variety of ages. This companion guide is designed to offer a brief description of steps for prompting and provides some ideas of how you might use it in your home.

# What are Visual Cues?

Visual cues are concrete objects, pictures, symbols, or written words that provide a child with information about how to do a routine, activity, behavior, or skill. Visual cues can help a child learn a new skill or become more independent with a skill.

### Types of visual cues

- *Behavior cues*– Visuals that show a child what behaviors are expected for certain activities or situations. For example, a post-it note with the word “quiet” that can be used if a family member is on a phone call.
- *Choice boards (or menu boards)* – A way of visually showing different choices a child can pick from. For example, a picture of snack options to select.
- *Communication cues* – Visuals that help a child to communicate. For example, a child might use pictures of different emotions to communicate how they are feeling.
- *Environmental cues* – Visuals that help a child know what is expected of them in a specific place. For example, a “no tablet” picture at the dinner table.
- *Labels* – Visuals that help a child know where to find and keep items in the home. For example, a picture of the container blocks should be placed into when finished playing.
- *Visual directions* - Visuals that show the steps to complete an activity or task. For example, the steps needed to get ready for bed at night (brush teeth, take a bath, and put on pajamas).





## What are the steps for using visual cues?

### 1. Identify the behavior or task

Choose the behavior that you will focus on while using visual cues with your child. Think about what you want the child to do, how you would like them to demonstrate the behavior, and when this behavior or task would be performed.



WHAT	HOW	WHEN
<b>Completing chores</b>	Choose a chore from a list (washing dishes, putting toys away, making bed, laundry)	At least 1 time per day
<b>Washing hands</b>	Steps to wash hands at bathroom sink	Before eating & after using the bathroom
<b>Communicate a want or need</b>	Make a food or snack selection	Late afternoons
<b>Morning routine</b>	Waking up, brushing teeth, getting dressed, eating breakfast	Each morning
<b>Move from one activity to another</b>	Moving from playtime to schoolwork time	Each afternoon
<b>Taking turns</b>	Play a game with parent, sibling, or friend	Family game night or play date
<b>Get ready for school/online learning</b>	Logging in to the remote learning session	At the beginning of remote learning meetings for school

*TIP:* Start by selecting a behavior or skill that your child needs help with to start or complete.

### 2. Choose visual cue(s) to use

Select visual cues (pictures, words, objects, combination of words/pictures) to use with your child while you are helping them learn a skill or behavior. Think about a visual cue that your child may be able to use independently after showing them the cue and teaching them the skill or behavior.



**TIP:** See **Examples of Visual Cues** for more information about creating/finding visual cues based on your child’s needs and/or interests.

**TIP:** Think about what type(s) of visual cues that will work best for your child and for the specific task to increase your child’s independence. Consider using simple written or typed words along with pictures for students that are learning to read.

**TIP:** For some children, seeing photographs of themselves or others doing a skill or behavior makes the learning process easier than just looking at drawings or pictures.

### 3. Choose types of prompts to use

Choose a prompt (cue or signal) to give your child if they need help with the task or behavior while using the visual cue. Prompts can be verbal, gestural, physical, visual, or a model.

**TIP:** To build independence try using the least restrictive prompt (least amount of assistance from an adult) to help your child with the task or behavior. For example, when teaching a child to wash their hands using visual directions, a gestural prompt (pointing to the visual directions showing turn on water) may be less restrictive than a verbal prompt (telling the child to “turn on the water”) or a physical prompt (taking the child’s hand and turning on the water).

**TIP:** See **Home Companion Guide for Prompting** for more information about least-to-most prompting.

Type of Prompt	Example
Gestural	Point to the picture or directions
Model	Show child how to follow the visual cue to do task
Physical	Move child’s hand to complete activity
Verbal	Say “Look at the picture”, “Read the directions” “What do you do next?”
Visual	Show child a picture or icon.

### 4. Choose rewards/reinforcers that will be motivating to your child

Choose rewards that will be motivating to your child. These can be a variety of things such as a specific item, time to do a preferred activity, or special praise from you and/or other members of your household.

**TIP:** See **Home Companion Guide for Reinforcement** for more information about reinforcement.



SOCIAL	ACTIVITIES/ITEMS
Tickles	Computer game
Hugs	Time to play outside
Praise (“Good job finishing homework,” “I love how you helped our sister clear the table”)	Favorite game
High-fives	Pokémon© cards
Clapping	Legos
Cheering	Drawing
Tight squeezes	Movie
	Swinging on a swing
	Preferred snack
	Tokens to earn larger reward

*TIP:* For rewards that are activities/items, try to avoid using rewards that your child can use at any time.

### 5. Show your child the cue and give a direction

Show your child the visual cue and give them simple directions on what they are expected to do.

*TIP:* If possible, stand or sit behind or next to your child while showing them the visual cue. This will help keep their attention on the cue and not on you.

*TIP:* Use short, simple language when giving the directions.

### 6. Wait for response (and prompt as needed)

Determine how much time to wait for your child to respond before giving them a prompt. If your child does not respond or does the task incorrectly, use a prompt to help them.

*TIP:* Everyone processes information at a different rate. The amount of time needed can be different depending on the task. Think about how long it generally takes your child to respond to a request or direction.

*TIP:* Use each prompt only once. Try a prompt hierarchy to use a least-to-most prompting strategy with your child. See the **Home Companion Prompting Hierarchy Examples** for examples of least-to-most restrictive prompts for the home setting.



## 7. Give reinforcement

Each time your child uses the behavior or skill, remember to give the reward even if prompts were needed.

*TIP:* Be consistent – if your child sees that you are not following through with the reward, then they may not be motivated to do what is expected.



# What are the key points to remember when using visual cues?

## 1. Start small and simple

Choose one task, activity, or behavior to focus on when starting with visual cues. Wait until your child has shown success with that behavior before using visual cues with other activities or tasks. Visual cues do not need to be elaborate. You can try a post-it note with stick drawings or a written list of steps on a piece of paper or a built-in app on your phone.

## 2. Be patient and consistent

Remember learning a skill or changing a behavior takes time. Once you start using visual cues, it may take time to see the changes. Keep trying, use the cue each time your child is doing the task/behavior, and you should see your child use the expected behavior more often.

## 3. Try not to over prompt

If you constantly prompt your child for all tasks, your child may develop prompt dependency (the need for prompting for tasks that your child has shown they know how to do). Visual cues can help with building independence.

## 4. Give enough time to respond

Everyone needs a moment to process a request or direction, and children with autism can have slower processing times. Choose a wait time that will help your child be successful not just based on the amount of time you want them to respond. A general starting wait time is at least 3-5 seconds before giving the next prompt. However, some children may need more time (10 seconds or longer).





**5. Remember to give reinforcement**

A reward may help your child be even more motivated to perform the task. It does not need to be a big reward – sometimes social praise is a big motivator.

**6. Have the visual cues ready to use**

Think ahead about when and where visual cues will be needed and have them ready to go. For cues that are location or activity specific, you may have them posted on a wall in a room. For cues that are used more broadly, you may want a few copies around the house. You may even want to keep some commonly used visuals (like behavior or communication cues) with you (for example, in your pocket) or with your child (for example, on a break-away lanyard).



## What are common challenges when using visual cues?

**Below are examples of what you can do if visual cues are not working exactly the way you expected.**

***Your child looks at you instead of the visual cue.***

Change positions. Try standing behind or beside your child when showing the visual cue and giving the directions. Point to the visual cue while you are giving the directions to keep your child’s focus on the cue and the task.

***After showing your child the visual cue, they wait until you give a prompt to do the task***

- a) When a child knows how to do a task but will only do it when prompted, they may be developing prompt dependency. To reduce prompt dependency, try:
- increasing response wait time – sometimes a little more time to process the directions can help a child start working on the task
  - increasing reinforcement for positive behaviors – when your child does what is expected, give some type of motivating reward

***Your child will not perform the task when given the visual cue***

- a) Try to determine the cause. Some possibilities are:

Cause	Suggestions
<b>The task is too difficult</b>	Break the task into smaller steps and focus on one step at a time. Creating a visual for each step may help.
<b>Child is not motivated</b>	Change the reward and/or give a choice of rewards.
<b>Child does not</b>	Use a different visual cue that gives the information needed to



<b>understand how to use the visual cue</b>	do the task/behavior in a way they can understand (for example, if you used words, try adding picture or if you used pictures, try changing to photographs). Show your child how to complete the task using the visual cue.
<b>Visual cue has too much information</b>	Make the visual cue simple. Too many pictures and words can be too much for a child to follow. Make the visual cue for one step of the task and use simple visuals to show how to complete the step.