



## Visual Supports (VS) ---Step-by-Step Guide---

### BEFORE YOU START...

Each of the following points is important to address so that you can be sure the selected EBP is likely to address the learning needs of your student.

Have you found out more information about. . . ?

- Established a goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target skill is, and how the team will know when the skill is mastered...
- Identifying evidence-based practices...

If the answer to any of these is “no,” review the process of how to select an EBP.

For more information visit:  
[www.afirm.fpg.unc.edu](http://www.afirm.fpg.unc.edu)

This practice guide outlines how to plan for, use, and monitor the visual supports practice.

Keep in mind that the three categories of visual supports are:

- Visual boundaries
- Visual cues
- Visual schedules

While each category is slightly different, the practice guide is applicable to all. When unique features are tied to a specific category, we will identify them through examples or cautions.

# Now you are ready to start...

## Step 1: VS Planning

The planning step explains how to identify what visual supports might work for learners and how to develop and prepare selected visual supports.

### 1.1 Identify visual supports needed to acquire or maintain target skills

To identify when visual supports should be used, think about activities and events that occur throughout the day and what behaviors or target skills you might want to address.

 *The **Visual Support Pre-Assessment Checklist** found in the Resource section will help you determine the category of supports (visual boundaries, visual cues, or visual schedules) that would work best for the learner with ASD.*

### 1.2 Develop/prepare visual support for learner based on individualized assessments

Use assessments to develop and prepare the presentation of the visual support that will be most beneficial to the learner with ASD. This process is slightly different for each category of visual supports.

- Visual Boundaries
  - When creating boundaries, remember boundaries provide information about where a particular area in the classroom or at home begins or ends or what activities are completed in an area or setting.
  - To create boundaries, use natural boundaries, objects, furniture, tape on the floor, or rugs to clearly designate the boundary area.
- Visual Cues
  - Visual cues include graphic organizers, visual instructions, labels, and choice boards.
  - When preparing visual cues consider:
    - The information needed to be presented visually.
    - Form of representation (objects, photographs, drawing or picture symbols, words, phrases, or a combination of formats).
- Visual Schedules
  - To create a visual schedule, consider the five core components of a schedule:
    - Form of representation:
      - functional objects,
      - representational objects,
      - photographs,
      - drawings or picture symbols,
      - words or phrases, or
      - a combination
    - Length of the schedule
      - One item, signifying upcoming transitions;

## Step 1: VS Planning (continued)

### 1.2 Develop/prepare visual support for learner based on individualized assessments (continued)

- Two items, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom;
- Three to four items, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom;
- Half-day, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom;
- Full day, presented left-to-right or top-to-bottom; or
- Technology based schedule.
- Method of manipulating the schedule
  - Learner with ASD carries an object that will be used in the upcoming activity,
  - Learner with ASD carries an object/visual cue that represents an upcoming area and then matches the object/visual cue to a pocket, basket, or envelope in the represented location,
  - Learner with ASD turns over the visual schedule cue or places the cue in a “finished” location when activity is completed, or
  - The learner with ASD marks of the visual cue on schedule as completed.
- Location of the schedule
  - Schedule information brought to the learner,
  - A stationary schedule in a central location (on a wall, shelf, desk), or
  - A portable schedule that a learner with ASD can carry across locations (e.g. clipboard, notebook, handheld device).
- Determine the method to initiate schedule use and transitioning from one activity to the next
  - Staff bring schedule information to the learner with ASD or
  - The learner with ASD moves to the schedule using a visual transition cue.

### 1.3 Organize all needed materials

Before learners with ASD arrive, make sure visual boundaries are in place and all visual cues and schedules are ready.

## Step 2: Using VS

### 2.1 Teach learner with ASD how to use visual support

The process of teaching how to use a visual support varies based upon the category.

- Visual Boundaries
  - Introduce the learner with ASD to the established boundary and point out the important boundaries and tasks completed in that area.
  - Use modeling to teach the learner with ASD to stay within the boundary.
  - Use reinforcement when learner with ASD stays within a boundary.
  - Use corrective feedback when learner does not stay within the boundary.
- Visual Cues
  - Show the learner with ASD the developed visual cue.
  - Stand behind the learner when prompting the use of the visual cue in order to make sure the learner is looking at the visual information and not the adult.
  - Use concise, relevant words/terms while teaching the visual cue.
  - Assist learner in participating in the activity/event with the visual cue.
- Visual Schedule
  - Stand behind the learner with ASD when prompting use of the visual schedule.
  - Place schedule information in learner's hand.
  - Use concise, relevant words/terms (identify location where learner is transitioning).
  - Assist learner with ASD in getting to designated activity/location, and prompt learner to place schedule materials in appropriate location.
  - Ensure learner remains in scheduled location until prompted to use schedule to transition.
  - Repeat steps until learner with ASD is able to complete the sequence independently across activities/locations.

### 2.2 Fade prompts as quickly as possible when criterion met

By fading prompts quickly, adults will teach learner with ASD not to rely on adult prompts but rather use the visual supports independently.

### 2.3 Use visual support consistently and across settings

Make sure all adults working with the learner with ASD are consistent with expectations, reinforcement, correction, and follow-through regarding the use of visual supports.

## Step 3: Monitoring VS

The following process describes how the use of visual supports can be monitored and how to adjust your plan based on the data.

### 3.1 Collect data on target behaviors and use of visual supports

Collect data on the learner's use of visual supports. Include information about the level of independence during use, time on-task, amount of work completed, and use of appropriate behaviors. For visual cues and schedules, include the level of independence during the use and the various forms/lengths of visual supports the learner uses.

 *The **Visual Support Progress Monitoring Form** and the **Visual Support Anecdotal Note** form found in the Resource section can be used to collect information on the learner's use of a visual support.*

### 3.2 Determine next steps based on learner progress

If the learner with ASD is showing progress with visual supports based upon collected data, then continue to use this practice with the learner. Gradually new target skills and behaviors can be introduced to the learner with ASD.

If the target skill or behavior is not increasing, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the target skill or behavior well defined?
- Is the skill or behavior measurable and observable?
- Is the skill too difficult and needs to be broken down into smaller steps?
- Have we devoted enough time to using this strategy?
- Were visual supports used with fidelity?
- Are the visual supports appropriate for the learner with ASD?
  - Are visual boundaries clear? Does the learner need additional boundaries?
  - Is the form of representation (e.g. object, photographs, and/or words) appropriate for the learner?
  - Is the length of the visual support appropriate for the learner?
  - Do adults need to provide more support for the learner in using the visual support?
- If these issues have been addressed and the learner with ASD continues not to show progress, consider selecting a different evidence-based practice to use with the learner with ASD.