AFIRM
for Paraeducators

VCIP

RESOURCE PACKET:
VISUAL CUES: INTRODUCTION & PRACTICE

UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute
Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules for Paraeducators
Sam, A., Steinbrenner, J., Chin, J., Morgan, W., & AFIRM for Paras Team,
Updated 2024

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice
NCAEP • BRIDGING PRACTICE AND SCIENCE

UNC | **FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**

OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

VISUAL CUES: INTRODUCTION & PRACTICE

WHAT ARE VISUAL CUES?

Visual Cues is a foundational practice that is used with other evidence-based practices (prompting and reinforcement). Visual Cues are concrete objects, pictures, symbols, or text that provide a student with information about a routine, activity, behavioral expectation, or skill. Visual cues must be appropriate for both the task and the learner's skill level and work to support a student's independence.

Learners on the spectrum often struggle when an adult provides verbal instructions of what to do or what will happen next. Yet, learners on the spectrum have strengths in visual detail processing and visual search skills. By visually presenting information, the learner might be able to process the information more easily and quickly.

Visual Cues can be used to address many different skills and target behaviors for elementary students. Research supports the use of visual cues for target skills and behaviors in the following domains: social, communication, behavior, school readiness, play, cognitive, motor, adaptive, and academic.

TARGET SKILL EXAMPLES

Visual Cues can be used to address many different skills and target behaviors for elementary students. Research supports the use of Visual Cues for target skills and behaviors in the following domains: social, communication, joint attention, behavior, school readiness, play, cognitive, motor, adaptive, and academic. Below are examples of possible target skills or behaviors that can be used for Visual Cues.

Academic

- Following steps of the editing process in writing
- Accurately answering reading comprehension questions
- Counting objects or counting by multiples (2s, 5s, 10s, etc.)
- Matching/sorting objects

Behavior

- Follow calm down routine
- Keep hands to self
- Use coping strategies for self regulation
- Redirecting or replacing repetitive behaviors that impact their performance in the classroom

Adaptive

- Making a choice at lunch or snack
- Matching weather and choice of clothes (ex. Winter versus Summer)
- Following a hand washing routine
- Learning to pay for lunch with real money

Cognitive

- Identify perspectives that differ from their own (e.g., peers, characters in book)
- Identifying a peer's perspective
- Maintain attention during group work
- List multiple solutions for a problem
- Use memory strategies (e.g., mnemonic devices) to learn test materials

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **4** of 30

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

Communication

- Ask for help when help is needed
- Ask peers questions during group work
- Verbally requesting wants/needs
- Express feelings or emotions verbally

Play

- Initiating play with peers
- Engaging in cooperative play with peers
- Participating in games

Joint attention

- No research support for this domain yet.

School-readiness

- Follow multi-step directions
- Raise hand to participate in class discussion
- Initiate work on assignments
- Organize notes or homework or filling out planner/agenda

Motor

- Use scissors
- Complete an obstacle course
- Use legible handwriting
- Where to bounce a ball

Social

- Take turns when playing a game
- Initiate/Continue conversation with a peer
- Initiate/Respond to adult/peer greetings
- Give compliments

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **5** of **30**

PLANNING GUIDE

General Planning:

WHO:

WHEN:
DATE:
TIME:

WHERE:

WHAT (TARGET SKILL):

HOW TO USE:

Visual Cue:

Type:

❑ Behavior cues

❑ Choice boards

❑ Communication cues

❑ Instructional cues

❑ Labels/Environmental visuals

❑ Visual directions

❑ Other:

Format:

Additional description:

Form:

❑ Object

❑ Photograph

❑ Picture/Symbol

❑ Text

❑ Other:

Types of Prompts:

Check off the types of prompts to use. Consider both task and student characteristics as well as the time available to work on the task.

❑ Gestural

❑ Verbal ☐ Less restrictive ☐ More restrictive

❑ Visual

❑ Model ☐ Partial model ☐ Full model

❑ Physical ☐ Partial physical ☐ Full physical

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **6** of **30**

Choose Order of Prompts:

Sequence prompts from least-to-most assistance.	Describe how the prompt will be used.
Level 1: Independent	
Level 2:	
Level 3:	
Level 4:	

Reinforcers to Use with Student:

Select reinforcers that will increase the student's use of the target skill or behavior in the future.

Know the Reinforcement Schedule

☐ Continuous schedule of reinforcement

☐ Intermittent schedule of reinforcement, Variable

How to Measure:

Use the area below for data collection or use a provided form in AFIRM Resources.

PLANNING GUIDE: JORDAN

General Planning:

WHO:
Jordan

WHEN:
DATE: 9/20/2019
TIME: 10:30AM

WHERE:
3rd grade physical education

WHAT (TARGET SKILL):
Jordan will use a calming strategy

HOW TO USE:
Visual cues

Visual Cue:

Type:

☑ Behavior cues

☐ Choice boards

☐ Communication cues

☐ Instructional cues

☐ Labels/Environmental visuals

☐ Visual directions

☐ Other:

Form:

☐ Object

☐ Photograph

☐ Picture/Symbol

☐ Text

☐ Other:

Format:

Additional description: Participating in physical education is a challenge for Jordan. Jordan has a visual cue to remind him to use a calming strategy when he is feeling anxious in PE.

Types of Prompts:

Check off the types of prompts to use. Consider both task and student characteristics as well as the time available to work on the task.

☑ Gestural

☐ Verbal   ☐ Less restrictive   ☐ More restrictive

☐ Visual

☑ Model   ☑ Partial model   ☑ Full model

☐ Physical   ☐ Partial physical   ☐ Full physical

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **8** of **30**

Choose Order of Prompts:

Sequence prompts from least-to-most assistance.	Describe how the prompt will be used.
Level 1: Independent	Jordan will independently use his behavior cue in the gym to use a calming strategy.
Level 2: Gestural	Jordan's teacher/para gestures to the behavior cue,
Level 3: Partial Model	Jordan's teacher/para uses a partial model prompt to show him the initial step for using a calming strategy.
Level 4: Full Model	Jordan's teacher/para models the full use of a calming strategy.

Reinforcers to Use with Student:

- Earn time with Legos
- Specific social praise

Know the Reinforcement Schedule

☐ Continuous schedule of reinforcement

☑ Intermittent schedule of reinforcement, Variable

How to Measure:

Use the area below for data collection or use a provided form in AFIRM Resources.

Opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	Reinforcer?
9/20	FM	FM	PM			
9/21	FM	PM	G			
9/22	G	G	I			
9/23	PM	G	G			
9/24	PM	I	I			

PLANNING GUIDE: KARI

General Planning:

WHO:
Kari

WHEN:
DATE: 1/27/2020
TIME: 1:30PM

WHERE:
Gen Ed

WHAT (TARGET SKILL):
On-topic comments in groupwork

HOW TO USE:
Visual cues

Visual Cue:

Type:

☐ Behavior cues

☐ Choice boards

☑ Communication cues

☐ Instructional cues

☐ Labels/Environmental visuals

☐ Visual directions

☐ Other:

Form:

☐ Object

☐ Photograph

☐ Picture/Symbol

☑ Text

☐ Other:

Format: Visual cue card with text

Additional description: Kari will use a visual cue with text to remind her to make at least two on topic comments during group work.

Types of Prompts:

Check off the types of prompts to use. Consider both task and student characteristics as well as the time available to work on the task.

☑ Gestural

☑ Verbal   ☑ Less restrictive   ☐ More restrictive

☑ Visual

☐ Model   ☐ Partial model   ☐ Full model

☐ Physical   ☐ Partial physical   ☐ Full physical

Choose Order of Prompts:

Sequence prompts from least-to-most assistance.	Describe how the prompt will be used.
Level 1: Independent	Kari will use her visual cue card to remind her to make 2 on more on topic comments during group work.
Level 2: Gestural	With a gestural prompt, Kari will use the visual cue card to make 2 or more on topic comments during group work.
Level 3: Verbal	The less restrictive verbal prompt, "Kari, remember to comment."
Level 4:	

Reinforcers to Use with Student:

- Extra 10 minutes to read
- Extra 10 minutes on the computer
- Verbal praise

Know the Reinforcement Schedule

☑ Continuous schedule of reinforcement

☐ Intermittent schedule of reinforcement, Variable

How to Measure:

Use the area below for data collection or use a provided form in AFIRM Resources.

PLANNING GUIDE: LIAM

General Planning:

WHO:
Liam

WHEN:
DATE: 2/14/2020
TIME: 10:40AM

WHERE:
Adapted curriculum classroom

WHAT (TARGET SKILL):
Unpack bookbag before final bell rings

HOW TO USE:
Visual cues

Visual Cue:

Type:

☐ Behavior cues

☐ Choice boards

☐ Communication cues

☐ Instructional cues

☑ Labels/Environmental visuals

☐ Visual directions

☐ Other:

Format:

Additional description:

Form:

☐ Object

☐ Photograph

☑ Picture/Symbol

☐ Text

☐ Other:

Types of Prompts:

Check off the types of prompts to use. Consider both task and student characteristics as well as the time available to work on the task.

☑ Gestural

☑ Verbal   ☐ Less restrictive   ☐ More restrictive

☐ Visual

☑ Model   ☑ Partial model   ☐ Full model

☐ Physical   ☐ Partial physical   ☐ Full physical

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

VCIP

Choose Order of Prompts:

Sequence prompts from least-to-most assistance.	Describe how the prompt will be used.
Level 1: Independent	Liam will independently use the environmental labels to unpack his book bag
Level 2: Gestural	Point to the environmental labels
Level 3: Verbal	Say, "Liam, it's time to unpack"
Level 4: Model	Unpack the first item in his backpack showing how it matches the labels.

Reinforcers to Use with Student:

- specific verbal praise
- smiley faces on schedule

Know the Reinforcement Schedule

☑ Continuous schedule of reinforcement

☐ Intermittent schedule of reinforcement, Variable

How to Measure:

Use the area below for data collection or use a provided form in AFIRM Resources.

Task Analysis for Unpacking Bookbag	2/14	2/15	2/16	2/17	2/18	Reinforcer?
Place parent communication log in bin	M	M	V	G	I	
Put lunch box in cubby	M	M	V	I	I	
Hang jacket (if he has one, could be NA)	V	G	I	I	I	

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

CLASSROOM PLANNING GUIDE

WHO	WHEN	WHERE	WHAT	PROMPT HIERARCHY
				❑ Independent: _____ ❑ Level 2: _____ ❑ Level 3: _____ ❑ Level 4: _____

VISUAL CUES TYPE		VISUAL CUES FORM	REINFORCEMENT SCHEDULE & REINFORCERS	NOTES
❑ Behavior cues ❑ Choice boards ❑ Communication cues ❑ Instructional cues ❑ Labels/Environmental visuals ❑ Visual directions ❑ Other:		❑ Object ❑ Photograph ❑ Picture/Symbol ❑ Text ❑ Other:	❑ Continuous ❑ Intermittent	

WHO	WHEN	WHERE	WHAT	PROMPT HIERARCHY
				❑ Independent: _____ ❑ Level 2: _____ ❑ Level 3: _____ ❑ Level 4: _____

VISUAL CUES TYPE		VISUAL CUES FORM	REINFORCEMENT SCHEDULE & REINFORCERS	NOTES
❑ Behavior cues ❑ Choice boards ❑ Communication cues ❑ Instructional cues ❑ Labels/Environmental visuals ❑ Visual directions ❑ Other:		❑ Object ❑ Photograph ❑ Picture/Symbol ❑ Text ❑ Other:	❑ Continuous ❑ Intermittent	

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **14** of **30**

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

VCIP

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

This step-by-step practice guide outlines how to plan for, use, and monitor Visual Cues.

Visual cues can be used to address many different skills and target behaviors for elementary students. Research supports the use of visual cues for target skills and behaviors in the following domains: social, communication, behavior, school readiness, play, cognitive, motor, adaptive, and academic.

PLAN

1. **Know the type of visual cue**
   - Talk with your supervising teacher about the type of visual cue to use with your student.
   - Review the student planning guide for detailed information on how to use visual cues for your student.
2. **Know what types of prompts to use with student**
   - Refer to your student planning guide for the types and order of prompts to use with your student.
   - Consider making a cheat sheet of the prompts you will be using.
3. **Know if reinforcers are needed**
   - Review the planning guide for specific items, activities, or actions that will be used as reinforcers.
   - Remember to update the student planning guide as you and your teacher make any necessary adjustments to the reinforcers for your student.
4. **Have materials accessible/ready to use**
   - Materials include the visual cue, task materials, reinforcers, and the data sheet.
5. **Know what data to collect**
   - Review the planning guide to see what data you should collect.
   - Be sure to select your data sheet and have it with you when it is time for the student to use the behavior or target skill. Sample data sheets are in the resources section that can be personalized for data collection.
   - Remember to collect data on the target skill that is identified on the planning guide.
   - If you have any additional questions about data collection, be sure to ask your supervising

USE

1. **Show the learner the visual cue**
   - Remember to have the visual cue, the materials for the task or activity, and potential reinforcers ready to use before you begin working with your student.
   - When you are ready to begin, get your student's attention and show them the visual cue.

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **15** of **30**

2. **Make sure the student's attention is on the visual cue and not you (e.g., stand behind or beside the learner)**
   - For many students, it may be important that you position yourself to the side or behind your student so that they focus on using the visual cue instead of any additional cues they may get from reading your facial expressions or body language.

3. **Use short phrases and key words to direct student**
   - You will likely need to provide task directions to help the student understand what is expected at the beginning of the task. Make sure to use short and simple language when you are providing those direction.
   - Remember, it is still important to speak and use the little words (like "in" and "the") even when using short phrases. So, if you are trying to get a student to color on a paper, say "Color the paper" or "Color on the paper," instead of "color paper."

4. **Assist the student in participating in the activity/task with visual cue**
   - **Prompt the student as needed**
     - Provide the student with a prompt if they are having difficulty using the target behavior or skill.
     - Remember to use the prompt hierarchy from the planning guide
   - **Use appropriate wait time throughout the task**
     - Try to be consistent with the wait time you allow before providing a prompt to your student.
     - You want to have a balance of giving your student enough wait time to begin (or work on) the target behavior or skill and knowing when they do need prompting.
   - **Provide reinforcement as needed**
     - If you are giving verbal praise, try to pair it with a description of the behavior (if appropriate). For example, "I like how you are taking turns playing with the ball with friends." instead of "Good job."
     - Remember to refer to your student planning guide for potential reinforcers to use with your student's individual behavior or skill.
     - Offer a variety of reinforcers. Remember it is important to use more than one reinforcer.
     - Changing reinforcers and adding new reinforcers to the planning guide can be discussed during the weekly check in with your supervising teacher.

MONITOR

1. **Take data on target behavior/skill**
   - Collect data on the target skill during the session. Find a data collection system that works well with the activity and for you – it may be post-it notes for a table task, but a clicker or app during a more active task like PE.
   - Make notes about anything that is going well or not going well.
2. **Check in with teacher about next steps at least weekly.**
   - Plan a time to check in with your teacher each week about:
     - Your progress using the practice (review the Visual Cues checklist)
     - The student's progress (review the data you collected)
     - Any necessary adjustments to the planning guide (if needed)

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

General Planning:

WHO:

WHEN:
DATE:
TIME:

WHERE:

WHAT (TARGET SKILL):

HOW TO USE:

HOW TO MEASURE:

		Date:	
		Observer's Initials:	
PLAN			
1.1	Know visual cues to use with student		
1.2	Know what types of prompts to use with student		
1.3	Know if reinforcers are needed		
1.4	Have materials accessible/ready to use		
1.5	Know what data to collect		
USE			
2.1	Show the learner the visual cue		
2.2	Make sure the student's attention is on the visual cue and not you (e.g., stand behind or beside learner)		
2.3	Use short phrases and key words to direct student		
2.4 Assist the student in participating in the activity/task with visual cue			
2.4A	Prompt the student as needed		
2.4B	Use appropriate wait time throughout the task		
2.4C	Reinforce the student as needed		
MONITOR			
3.1	Collect data on target skill/behavior		
3.2	Check in with teacher about next steps at least weekly		

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **17** of **30**

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST: MULTI-USE

Observation:	1	2	3	4	5
Date:					
Observer's Initials:					
PLAN					
1.1 Know visual cues to use with student					
1.2 Know what types of prompts to use with student					
1.3 Know if reinforcers are needed					
1.4 Have materials accessible/ready to use					
1.5 Know what data to collect					
USE					
2.1 Show the learner the visual cue					
2.2 Make sure the student's attention is on the visual cue and not you (e.g., stand behind or beside learner)					
2.3 Use short phrases and key words to direct student					
2.4 Assist the student in participating in the activity/task with visual cue					
2.4A Prompt the student as needed					
2.4B Use appropriate wait time throughout the task					
2.4C Reinforce the student as needed					
MONITOR					
3.1 Collect data on target skill/behavior					
3.2 Check in with teacher about next steps at least weekly					

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **18** of **30**

AFIRM *for Paraeducators*

COMPANION GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

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 the 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
Completing chores	Choosing a chore from a list (washing dishes, putting toys away, making bed, laundry)	At least 1 time per day
Washing hands	Steps to wash hands at bathroom sink	Before eating & after using the bathroom
Communicate a want or need	Make a food or snack selection	Late afternoons
Morning routine	Waking up, brushing teeth, getting dressed, eating breakfast	Each morning

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **19** of 30

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

VCIP

WHAT	HOW	WHEN
Move from one activity to another	Moving from playtime to schoolwork time	Each afternoon
Taking turns	Play a game with parent, sibling, or friend	Family game night or play date
Get ready for school/online learning	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 Visual Cues: Home 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 Companion Guide for Families: 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.

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **20** of 30

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

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 Companion Guide for Families: Reinforcement for more information about reinforcement.
    - **TIP:** For rewards that are activities/items, try to avoid using rewards that your child can use at any time.

Social	Activities/Items
• Tickles • Hugs • Praise ("Good job finishing homework," "I love how you helped your sister clear the table") • High-fives • Clapping • Cheering • Tight squeezes	• Computer game • Time to play outside • Favorite game • Pokémon© cards • Legos • Drawing • Movie • Swinging on a swing • Preferred snack • Tokens for token reinforcer

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 Prompting Hierarchy Examples: Home for examples of least-to-most restrictive prompts for the home setting.

7. **Give reinforcement (rewards) each time your child shows the desired behavior**

    Each time your child uses the behavior or skill, remember to give the reward even if the 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 do what is expected.

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

WHAT ARE THE KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN USING VISUAL CUES?

1. **Start small**

   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 and stay consistent 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 on the spectrum 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 breakaway lanyard).

WHAT ARE COMMON CHALLENGES WHEN USING VISUAL CUES?

The following 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.

A. **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.

Your child will not perform the task when give the visual cue

A. Try to determine the cause. Some possibilities are:

Cause	Suggestion
Child does not understand how to use the visual cue	Use a different visual cue that gives the information needed to understand how to use the visual cue 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.
The task is too difficult	Break into smaller steps and focus on one step at a time.
Child is not motivated	Change reward and/or give a choice of rewards.
Visual cue has too much information	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.

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

Suggested Citation:

Perkins, Y., Sam, A., & AFIRM for Paras Team. (2020). *Visual Cues: Companion Guide for Families.* The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules for Paraeducators. https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE — AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules — The National Professional Development Center on Autism — The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **23** of 30

VISUAL CUES EXAMPLES: HOME

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.

Below are examples of types and forms of visual cues. These are just examples. You should use a visual cue that will work best for your child.
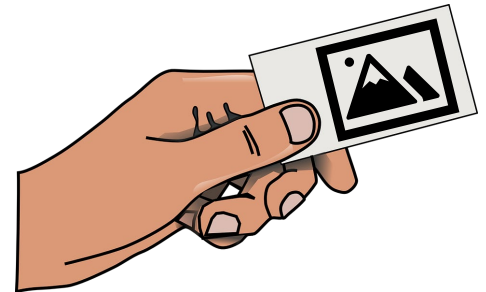
BEHAVIOR CUE: Visuals that help show a student what behaviors are expected in certain situations, activities, or environments.	
Sticky notes with/out representative symbols describing expected behavior	**Mute microphone when not talking** / **Quiet time**
Printed clipart and/or icons	voice levels: 0 no talking, 1 "spy talk", 2 partnership & small group, 3 normal voice, 4 presenter, 5 outside / **Click the hand icon to ask a question**
Printed photos with words depicting expected behavior	**Complete schoolwork** / **Pet softly/gently**

AFIRM *for Paraeducators*

CHOICE/MENU BOARDS: A way of visually representing choices for a student to select.
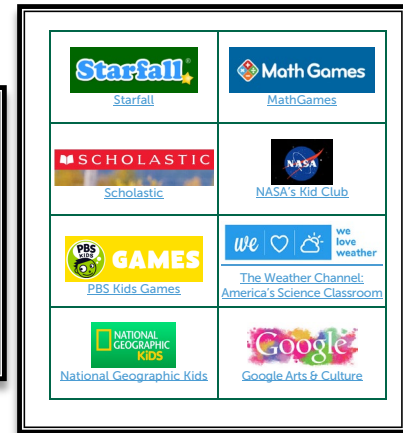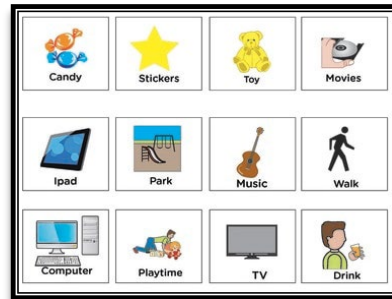
Printed clipart and/or icons of choices with words	
Printed photos of choices with/out words	
Physical objects to choose from	

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **25** of 30

AFIRM
for Paraeducators

COMMUNICATION CUES: Visuals that help a child to communicate.
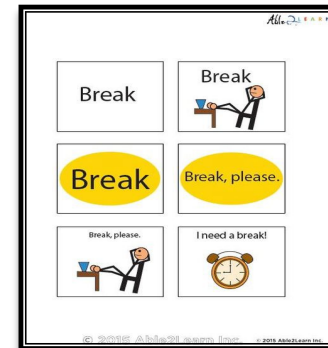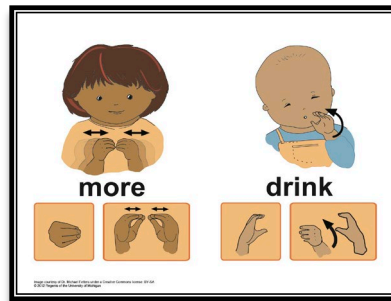
Printed clipart and/or icons of choices with words	
Printed photos with words	
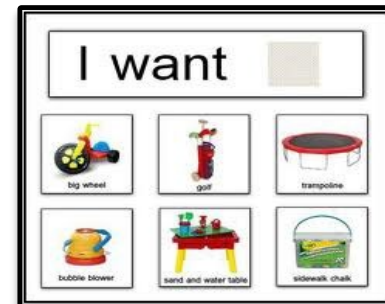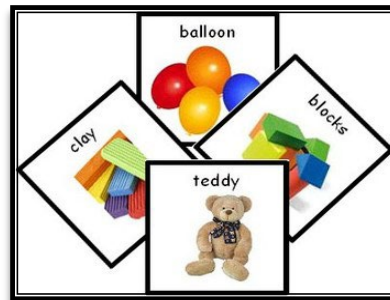
ENVIRONMENTAL CUES: Visuals that help a child know what is expected of them in a specific place.
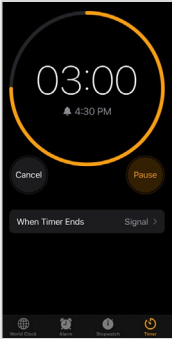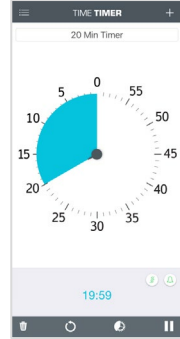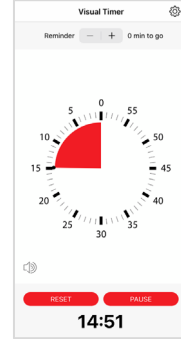
Printed clipart and/or icons with/out words depicting expected behavior	Quiet time
Printed photos with/out words depicting expected behavior	Flush
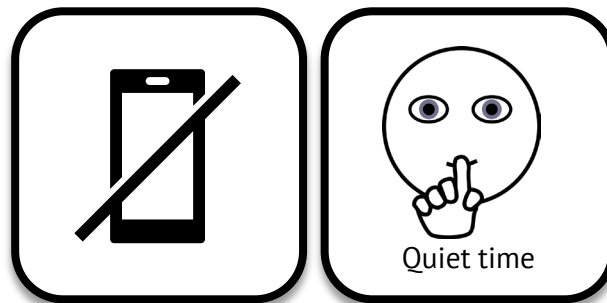
UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **26** of **30**

ENVIRONMENTAL CUES: Visuals that help a child know what is expected of them in a specific place.

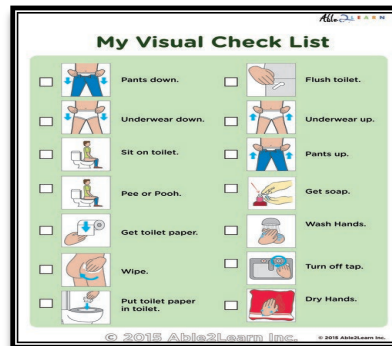|	
Timers **OK-to-Wake night light** **Stoplight timer**	
App Timers iPhone clock TIME TIMER (Apple App Store/Google Play) Visual Timer (Apple App Store)	

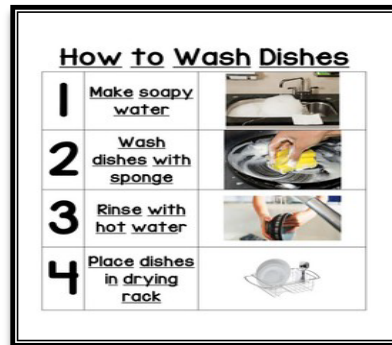**LABELS: Visuals that help a child know where to find and keep items in the home**

Printed clipart and/or icons with words	
Physical objects	

UNC | FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **27** of **30**

VISUAL DIRECTIONS: Visuals that show the steps to complete an activity or task

Printed clipart and/or icons with words	
Printed photos with words	
Physical objects	
First/Then	

VCIP
Sam et al., 2024 Update
Page **28** of **30**

UNC FRANK PORTER GRAHAM CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AFIRM Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

The National Professional Development Center on Autism

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice
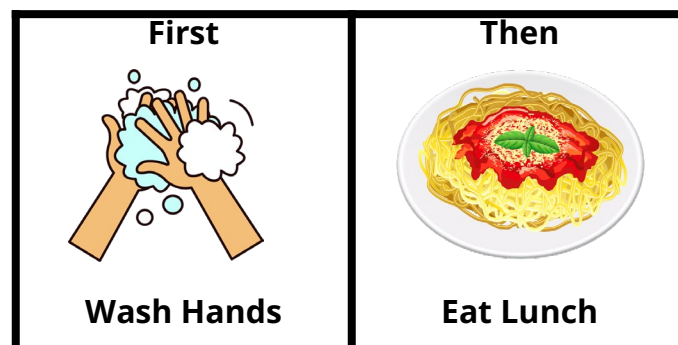
GLOSSARY

Behavior cues: Visuals that help show a student what behaviors are expected in certain situations, activities, or environments. Some examples may be a picture of different volumes to show that quiet voices are expected in certain areas of the classroom or a photo that shows what you should do to use whole body listening during large group activities.

Choice boards: A way of visually representing choices for a student to select. Choice boards are sometimes referred to as menu boards.

Communication cues: Visuals that help to remind a student to communicate in some way. Some examples are a picture to remind them to ask to go to the bathroom or written scripts to help them have conversations or ask questions.

Controlling prompt: Words and/or actions to ensure that the learner will perform the target skill successfully. It can be a gestural, verbal, visual, model, or physical prompt.

Environmental visuals: Visuals that help students know what is expected of them for a specific part of the learning environment. One example is a stop sign on the door, so students understand not to go out the door on their own.

Fidelity: How well and how often the implementation steps for an evidence-based practice are followed.

Implementation checklist: The specific steps needed to accurately follow an evidence-based practice.

Independent: A student is able to use a behavior or skill without assistance or support from an adult or peer.

Instructional cues: Visuals that provide support for completing assignments by helping organize thoughts and planning. Some common examples are graphic organizers and adapted books.

Labels: Visuals that help students know where to find and keep items in a classroom.

Positive reinforcement: Feedback provided to the learner (e.g., praise or reward) after the learner performs the target skill or behavior.

Prompt dependence: When a learner will only perform a skill or behavior with the use of a prompt. Prompt dependence may limit a learner's growth and path towards independence.

Prompt: Assistance given to help the learner perform a specific (target) skill or behavior. Prompts can be verbal, gestural, physical, visual or a model.

Reinforcer: Motivating attention, activity, or material provided to a learner immediately after completing the target skill/behavior to increase the likelihood the target skill/behavior will be used again in the future. Must be age-appropriate and meaningful to the learner.

Visual cues: Concrete objects, pictures, symbols, or text that provide a student with information about a routine, activity, behavioral expectation, or skill. Visual cues must be appropriate for both the task and the learner's skill level and work to support a student's independence.

Visual directions: Visuals that organize instructions for an activity or task. These can include things like arranging steps or tasks in visually distinct areas (like drawers, compartments, file folders) or providing written or pictorial steps for a task.