Why Use Visual Supports/Schedules?

Individuals with sensory processing and/or attentional challenges typically have:

- o Relatively weak receptive language skills meaning that it is can be difficult to learn from what they hear.

- o Difficulty with initiation. It can be hard to get started on a new activity.

- o Trouble visualizing the steps of a process or activity. When a child can't see how to break down a large activity into smaller steps, it can feel stressful or impossible.

- o Difficulty seeing when something is finished. Sometimes this leads to not wanting to start the activity, or difficulty stopping an activity.

- o Difficulty changing routines once formed. This can be hard to change without visual instructions that provide a clear understanding about what to do.

Types of Visual Supports

My **schedule** says it's math time; my **to-do-list** says pages 22-23; my **instructions** say to solve for x.

Schedule:

- Tells you where to go and when

- Helps you see a big picture of parts of your day or the whole day

- Helps you see planned and last minute changes

To-Do List:

- Shows specifically what you have to do to

- Shows that you're making progress (check off, mark off)

- Tells you what to do next (i.e. check schedule, read, ask teacher what to do next)

Instructions:

- Tells you explicitly what to do in a way you understand

- Helps you see how to start, what the steps are, and when the activity will be finished

- Helps you see the main point without getting distracted by the materials

How to Determine the Right Format of Visual Representation

- Visual Schedules, To-Do-Lists & Instructions can be created using words only, images, photographs or a combination of words and images/photographs. In cases where students are extremely developmentally delayed and very concrete, a schedule can be made using objects.

- The format of the visual selected should be selected based on a mastered (not emerging) level of understanding. For example, if a student has not yet learned to read, they will benefit from a schedule with photographs or images. If a student is not yet able to engage in abstract thought (i.e. would be unable to understand what real life object an image represents) a schedule using real life photographs will be beneficial.

- If a visual schedule is "not working" for a student (i.e. do not reference schedule, get mad at schedule, rip images off of Velcro etc.), this is often because it is not the right level of visual representation and the schedule does meet the student's mastered level of understanding. Tweaking format of the schedule (i.e. changing it from clipart or boardmaker images to real life photos) can solve this problem.

Other Tips for Using Visual Schedules

- Students often need to be taught how to use and reference their visual schedule (i.e. modeling, social story etc.).

- Generally dividing a schedule up into shorter chunks (i.e. from morning until lunch, then from lunch until end of the day, First/Then etc.) is more effective and less visually overwhelming for students.

- Allowing students to mark off or remove schedule items as they are completed increases motivation and makes using the schedule reinforcing.

- Each morning/afternoon, review the schedule for that day or period of time. If there are changes from the typical routine, point these out.

- Use the schedule to prepare student for unexpected events before they happen (e.g. fire drills, assemblies) to allow the child time to prepare.