

## **www.autismhelp.info**

### **Visual schedules**

#### **What is a visual schedule?**

A schedule is a tool that enables students to keep track of the day's events and activities, as well as develop an understanding of time frames and an appreciation of environmental sequences.

Schedules are an important teaching tool for the student with autism because they have:

- Limited understanding of the concept of time, ie. knowing what is happening or will happen and then sequencing, predicting and organising the order of events.
- Difficulty with communication. This includes difficulty understanding verbal explanations of what will happen at certain times during the day.
- Rigidity and need for sameness. Changes can create considerable stress for students with autism. One way to reduce stress and increase opportunities for success is to use schedules.

A visual schedule can increase the student's independence and ability to understand classroom routine. You may find the student becomes less dependent on teaching staff and verbal instructions, along with a reduction in difficult behaviour and repetitive questions.

#### **Types of Visual Schedules**

Yearly diaries

Term Diaries

Monthly Calendars

Weekly Calendars / Timetables

Schedules of one hour, 10 minutes or less

General daily classroom schedule with activities and individual tasks

Individual work skill schedule

Sequence charts / schedule of daily routines

#### **Visuals Are Important!**

Remember, most students with autism spectrum disorder are visual learners, so where appropriate use pictures and written words in conjunction with verbal communication.

You can use a computer program such as Boardmaker™ to make your visual schedule, use photos, clipart or download and print the pictures on [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com)

A range of formats can be used, including posters, blackboard / whiteboard, diary, strips, small photo albums, business card holders, cardboard strips or books.

#### **Behaviour**

Schedules can be the cornerstone of management practices for students with challenging behaviours. Specific behavioural deficits can be managed using schedules. For example, to clarify expectations, set limits, reduce negative teacher attention for undesired behaviour. Schedules can indicate that a preferred activity will follow a non-preferred activity.

#### **Communication**

Schedules can be used in a variety of ways to develop language and aid comprehension depending

upon the individual student's needs. For students with limited verbal language, schedules can provide an opportunity to interact and communicate.

### **Social Skills**

Time spent outside the classroom can be extremely challenging for students with autism; many find this an extremely overwhelming experience. Using a schedule of 'activities to do during breaks' can considerably reduce anxiety. Provide a range of appropriate activities (written word, Compic, photos etc. depending upon student's needs). At first you may need to select the order. These ideas can be placed on small cards and carried in the child's pocket.

The above text adapted from "Making It A Success" by Sue Larkey  
See **Recommended Reading** for details.

A great little site that explains the use of visual supports and social stories can be found at [www.angelfire.com/ky/touristinfo/index5.html](http://www.angelfire.com/ky/touristinfo/index5.html)

[www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com) is an educational site for children with special needs. Click on the 'picture cards' link in the Free Area to access a large range of visual images.