

TOOLKIT · VERSION 1

Visual Supports

Show, don't just tell — templates for visual schedules, choice boards, and first-then cues.

How to use this toolkit

Skim once, then choose one practice to try this week. Toolkits are living documents — mark them up, share them with your team, and revisit as your needs evolve.

Overview

Visual supports make abstract expectations concrete. They're effective for children, teens, and adults — not just for autism.

Why it matters

When language processing is loaded or slow, an image cuts through. Visual supports reduce conflict, transitions, and the number of times anyone has to repeat themselves.

Research summary

Visual supports are an evidence-based practice with strong effects across autism and developmental populations (Hume et al., 2021 NPDC review).

Practical strategies

Schedules

- Picture or text schedules for predictable parts of the day.
- First-Then boards for hard transitions.
- Countdown visuals (5–4–3–2–1) for endings.

Choice & control

- Choice boards with 2–3 acceptable options.
- Visual menus for meals, activities, calm-down strategies.

Expectations

- Visual rules with pictures, not paragraphs.
- Social stories for novel situations.

Ready-to-use scripts & worksheets

First-Then template

FIRST: [task you need to do] → THEN: [thing you want to do]. Keep both pictures or symbols visible until the transition is complete.

Recommended lessons & next steps

- Toolkit: Sensory Regulation — /toolbox
- Family & Educator Toolkits — /family, /training

Selected references & further reading

- Hume K, et al. *Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with autism*. *J Autism Dev Disord*. 2021.

Ask the AI Companion

Visit understandingneurodiversity.org/companion to ask follow-up questions about **Visual Supports**. The Companion will recommend lessons, conditions, and research tailored to your role.