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Using Visual Strategies to Support and Teach Successfully
(Offered as suggestions for consideration only)
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Many people with special learning differences learn more through their visual/spatial systems than from only listening to what is said. Try to incorporate visual cues whenever possible. Sometimes providing the visual cues to an entire group will improve the performance of all of the primary visual processors you teach. (Some research indicates that more than 70% of people are primary visual processors, but that most teaching is done by talking!)

Some visual/spatial strategies are:
- printed schedules (printed by hand or on the computer)
- printed task lists that list every step of the task in order
- peel and stick arrows pointing to the next thing to do
- overlays to put on a page that only display the area of the page upon which the person should focus
- circles drawn around the target area
- color-codes to match books and workbooks, etc.
- visual token systems for rewards
- 3-d rewards such as manipulatives or small toys
- rules lists placed where the person can see them easily
- visual timers such as sand timers, LED watches, cooking timers or the Time Timer
- a marked section of the floor to which a person may move if s/he needs to stand instead of sit
- compliment cards to give to others
- social scripts to teach what to say to other children and adults
- lists of topics to raise with others
- a personalized calendar with important events marked
- taped areas on the floor or table top to indicate the space within which an activity will be done
- specific areas used consistently for certain activities (such as a table where we eat, a different table where we write, work, etc.)
- labels or picture on shelves where to put things away
- drawings or cartoons to teach social skills such as looking towards someone who has called you

Daily Written Schedule Lists

Make very simple, handwritten, daily schedule lists of what is going to happen in a person's life each day. Suggest that the parents/staff start one in the morning that describes the events of the day, including what is likely to happen when the person comes home and in the evening.

At school or work, a list can be created that shows the person the anticipated events of the day. As each event on the list is completed, the person or staff can cross if off and look to see what

the next event or activity will be. Breaks, recess, etc. should be listed as well as any "specials" that might be happening. For some people, only a few items should be put on the list at a time.

Be sure to individualize. Lists can be created with the support of team members or peers. If a change occurs during the time period, get the list, cross off what will not happen, and write in what will happen instead. If there is a block of time during which you are unsure what will happen, indicate by writing in "I don't know yet" or "Not sure".

Initially, people do not have to "perform" anything with these lists. Staff and family simply create them, refer to them, show the value of the list, and keep the schedule list available where the person can easily reference it. During the time that the schedule list is being made for a particular day, staff and family can insert several opportunities for "free choice time" and the person can indicate what s/he would like to add to the schedule at that point.

One idea of the daily schedule list is to help people anticipate and be ready for changes from day to day. Therefore, do not make copies and give the person the same list every day. Instead, make the schedule reflect the small and subtle changes that occur from day to day such as indoor or outdoor play, a substitute teacher, a change in work responsibilities, a visitor coming to the home, etc.

Another benefit to the schedule list is that it helps begin to teach the important lifetime skill of "read and do." As each item on the list is "read," we "do" it. In this way, people can gain more independence and competence in moving through their day. A printed schedule should not be stigmatizing and should be put into a form similar to that used by same-aged peers.

Over time, people can be given a list and be taught to follow it through the day. They can learn to use lists as a way to self-monitor and self-correct. The ability to follow a list of scheduled activities can become a life long support strategy. For example, at work, an employer could give an employee (perhaps a person with ASD) a list of the day's tasks and the employee would know how to read it and move through the list, accomplishing each task. Families can use daily schedule lists at home to help children and adults learn to organize themselves more independently.

Whiteboards can be used in each "sub-environment" of the day to let people know specifically what the next several activities will be. For example, a person's printed list might say, "Work training with Mrs. Smith, 10:30 AM." When the person arrives at work (a sub-environment of the building), Mrs. Smith could show a whiteboard (or paper) list that tells the person what the next few activities will be. The last entry on the whiteboard might be, "Go back to class," or another message that lets the person know what to do when work training is finished.

Example: Welcome to Work Training, Matthew!
                      Today we will:
                      Practice cleaning tables.
                      Follow a list to put things away.
                      Play a word card game to learn to read working words.
                      Work training is finished. Go to the break room and enjoy your break.

Keep the daily schedule list as a fluid and changing daily document that records both what we expect to happen and what unexpected events or changes occurred. Send the daily schedule list home with the person so that parents, friends or staff will know the events of the day as they actually happened and will be better able to converse with the person about the day.

Some people may object to the daily schedule list saying that that person already *knows* what is going to happen each day at school and has memorized the schedule. People with disabilities are sometimes very good at memorizing the schedule. However, some people have significant

problems with any changes from the memorized routine or coping with any unexpected events, (a holiday party, fire drill, the hallway being painted, the pool is closed, etc.)

When a person has a daily schedule list, s/he will be able to use the list as an object with which to gain mental focus during a time of change or transition. The list becomes a focal point from which information can be gained about changes. The list can help the person remain calm, self-organized, and self-regulated when events suddenly or unexpectedly change. Over time, many people adapt their daily schedule without having to change the physical list, as they internalize the process.

Be sure to enlist the aide of the person's team members to create and teach the use of a daily schedule list. As the person becomes able to use the list more functionally, s/he can create and use the list more independently to enhance participation and self-regulation throughout the day. That is the goal!

Task Lists

Most people and adults use lists. They are not stigmatizing or degrading. They are considered a helpful part of daily life. They do not draw attention to what people cannot do. Lists are a lifelong support strategy for most people.

Teach people to follow simple lists that show the steps used to complete a task. Here are ten important reasons to teach people to follow the steps of a task list:

1. When the list is carefully made, it tells people how to complete the task.
2. The list is visual, spatial and concrete combining three areas of learning strength for most people on the autism spectrum.
3. Using the list works with the rote memory portion of the brain. Rote memory is a strength for many people with disabilities.
4. Using the list causes the adults in the environment to teach the task the same way every time. Consistency in teaching increases learning.
5. Using the list can become a life-long. self-supporting device.
6. When people learn to complete the steps on a list, they gain greater independence and satisfaction. They appear more competent to their peers.
7. Using a list helps prepare people to receive the reinforcement or reward when the steps of the task on the list are completed.
8. Using a list helps reduce the need for interpersonal support, over time.
9. The risk of verbal prompt dependence is decreased when people learn to follow the steps on a written task list.
10. Task lists can include information about what to do when the task is completed. This can assist people in making smoother transitions.

Task List hints:
  ❖ Ask members of the person's team to help you identify tasks the person could learn to do by following a list of steps.
  ❖ Ask members of the person's team to help make the task lists.
  ❖ Keep commonly used task lists in a card file box in your room.

Individual Calendars

People may benefit from receiving information in the form of a personal calendar. This calendar would be individualized and age appropriate. Use a calendar that is similar to calendars used by other people. Make notations in pencil. Change notations on the calendar as new information becomes available. In this way, the calendar becomes a metaphor for flexibility in thinking and action. It can become a life long self-supporting strategy.

Use of the calendar for the "big picture" of events to come, in combination with Daily Written Schedule Lists provides people with information about their world and probably reduces some anxiety that may result from not truly understanding the timing of events.
To begin, show the person a blank calendar page for the current month. Fill in dates and items of interest. Each day, the person would be encouraged to cross off the previous day and discuss what events are shown on the calendar for the next day and in the future.

Some things that would be important to show on a calendar would be:
• Any event that does not happen every day such as once a week events or once a month events
• Any event that could cause anxiety such as a day when a staff or family member will be absent or work will be done in another room
• Any event that the person anticipates eagerly such as a trip to visit someone or a special party or outing
• Indications for if it is a day that s/he will go to school, work, friend's house or not
• Changes in who is in the building, classroom, halls, office, lunchroom, workplace, etc.
• Any other event of interest to the person or that has an impact on the person

Individual Calendar Hints:
❖ Ask members of the person's team to help you create and use the calendar.
❖ The person may review the daily calendar and add input with a team member or a peer.
❖ The individual can carry his or her calendar in a portable calendar book or on a palm pilot type of device.