

Module 4: Structuring the Environment

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words...

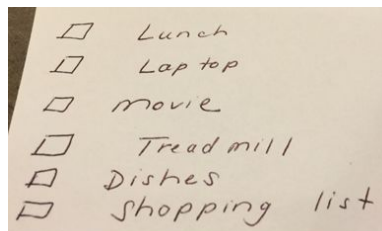
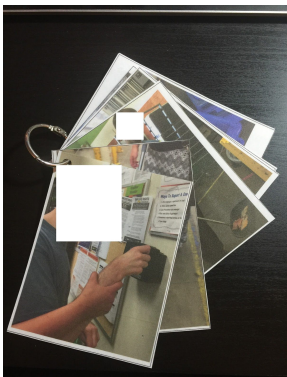
We can maximize success for individuals with ASD by the way we set up the environment to support learning and understanding. A structured environment clarifies expectations, establishes predictability, promotes skill acquisition and fosters independent functioning. We are focusing on the “A” in A-B-C.



Key Elements

Visual supports are any visual information in the environment that supports teaching and assists an individual with understanding, learning and functioning. Although individuals with ASD are all unique, visually presenting information tends to be more successful than verbally presenting information. Think about the characteristics of individuals with ASD and why visual information might be easier to process and retain than verbal information. When we use visual information, we can decrease verbal prompting.

What kind of visual system a person uses can vary. Some people may prefer to use objects. Other people may prefer photographs. Or pictures. Or drawings. Or the written word.

















We can structure the physical environment of an individual with ASD to maximize success. One way to do that is to minimize visual and physical clutter in the environment. Try to organize



materials and space. You may wish to label or color code materials that the individual frequently uses. Place instructions on or close to the tool the individual uses.

Routines can be a critically important part of the life of a person with ASD. A routine is doing things in a particular order. Knowing what to expect and what happens next increases the likelihood of success and decreases the likelihood of challenging behaviors.

One of the tools you may have seen frequently used with individuals with ASD is a schedule or a calendar. Schedules and calendars increase predictability in the individual's environment by letting him/her know what to expect. Schedules/calendars also communicate the sequence of events and help ease transitions. First this will happen, then this, then this, etc.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						
						

The most basic form of a schedule is a "First/Then" board. Typically, the preferred activity comes after the non-preferred activity, although when teaching the concept of "First/Then" it may be helpful to list two preferred activities.

FIRST	THEN
	

To create a daily schedule, you must know the individual's routine. Chose what type of schedule you are going to create for the individual based on how he/she learns best (ex., object, picture, written words.) Divide the individual's day into different segments and decide how you are going to represent each segment. Plan for how the individual will indicate s/he has completed an activity.

When creating any type of schedule or calendar, you may want to consider including a balance of activities, both necessary (take shower, eat breakfast) and preferred (go bowling, talk to a

family member on the phone.) When the individual has completed a task in a sequence or on his/her visual schedule, he/she can move the item to a completed or finished category.



Remember to place the calendar or schedule in a place where the individual can reference it easily and often throughout his/her day. Whenever possible, the individual should manipulate his/her own schedule rather than someone else doing it for him/her.

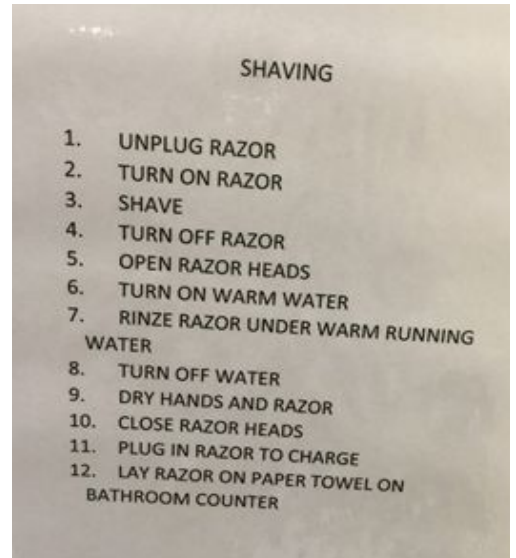
When working with individuals with ASD, it may be helpful to make rules explicit as a way to clarify behavioral expectations. Rather than stating what we don't want to see, ex., no yelling, express the rule as a behavior we do want to see, ex., use a quiet voice. Refer to the rules as necessary during the day and review the individual's success in following the rules at the conclusion of the day. Give very specific examples and, if possible, ask the individual to access his/her own behavior.

Another tool we can use is called task analysis. This is basically breaking down a complex task into simple, discrete steps.

You can create a task analysis by performing a task yourself, or watching someone else perform the task, and writing down each discrete step. You can teach the person to perform each step in the task by moving from the first step to the last step or the last step to the first step.

For more information on how to create a task analysis, you may wish to read the module created by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders at

http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/sites/autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/files/TaskAnalysis_Steps_0.pdf



For examples of free visual supports, you can visit the Indiana Resource Center for Autism at <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/visualsupports>



Activity

1. Create a task analysis for one (or more) of the following activities:
 - a. Brushing teeth
 - b. Loading the dishwasher
 - c. Sorting laundry
 - d. Tying shoes
 - e. Handwashing
 - f. Making a cup of coffee
2. Design a daily schedule for the individual with ASD that you support. Be sure to match the individual's preferred learning modality. Decide what level of detail and activities you will include, whether or not you'll include times, and how the person will manipulate his/her schedule.



Tips and Strategies

- Remember, it's First-Then *not* If-Then!
- Place the emphasis on being proactive rather than reactive.
- Match the support to the individual's preferred learning modality:
 - Objects
 - Photographs
 - Pictures
 - Drawings
 - Written words
- Involve the individual in the creation of his/her own supports!



Resources and References-Module 4

Websites

Autism Internet Modules

<http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/>

Indiana Resource Center for Autism

<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/irca>

Print-A-Calendar

<http://print-a-calendar.com/>

Tasks Galore

<http://www.tasksgalore.com/>

The Incredible 5-Point Scale

<http://www.5pointscale.com/>

Time Timer

<http://www.timetimer.com/>

Books

Buron, K. D. (2012). *Social behavior and self-management: 5-point scales for adolescents and adults*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: AAPC Publishing.

Eckenrode, L., Fennell, P., & Hearsey, K. (2004). *Tasks galore for the real world*. Raleigh, North Carolina: Tasks Galore Publishing Company.

Gray, C. (2010). *The new social story book*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc.

Hodgdon, L.A. (1995). *Visual strategies for improving communication: Practical supports for school and home*. Troy, Michigan: QuirkRoberts Publishing.

Orth, T. (2006). *Visual recipes: A cookbook for non-readers*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: AAPC Publishing.

Journal Articles

Hume, K., Loftin, R., & Lantz, J. (2009). Increasing independence in autism spectrum disorders: A review of three focused interventions. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 39(9), 1329-1338. DOI: 10.1007/s10803-009-0751-2

Schall, C.M. (2010). Positive behavior support: Supporting adults with autism spectrum disorders in the workplace. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 32(2), 109-115. DOI: 10.3233/JVR-2010-0500

Palmen, A., Didden, R., & Lang, R. (2012). A systematic review of behavioral intervention research on adaptive skill building in high-functioning young adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 6(2), 602-617. doi: 10.1016/j.rasd.2011.10.001

Van Bourgondien, M. E., Reichle, N. C., & Schopler, E. (2003). Effects of a model treatment approach on adults with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 33, 131–140. DOI: 10.1023/A:1022931224934

Watanabe, M. & Sturmey, P. (2003). The effect of choice-making opportunities during activity schedules on task engagement of adults with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 33(5), 535–538. doi:10.1023/A:1025835729718