

# Visual Schedules: A Practical Guide for Families

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# VISUAL SCHEDULES

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

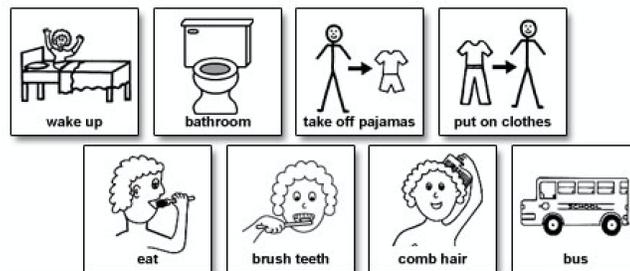
### Who can benefit from visual schedules?

Visual schedules are a useful tool that can be used by most populations, but they are particularly helpful for individuals with autism. Research has found that individuals with autism may be more responsive when information is presented visually in a step-by-step manner than when it is presented in an auditory manner.

Visual schedules have been effectively used with people of all ages, from toddlerhood through adulthood. However, research demonstrates that visual schedules are most effective for individuals with autism from late childhood through adolescence.

### What is a visual schedule?

Visual schedules are an intervention that can help individuals with autism follow a routine, transition between activities, develop new skills, and reduce dependence on caretakers when completing daily activities. A visual schedule is a sequence of photographs, videos, line drawings, symbols, text, or other visual format that is used to show its user what he or she is expected to do. The series of visually presented tasks are arranged in the schedule in the order they are to be completed. This provides the schedule's user with a visual template and a predictable list of expected behaviors. Visual schedules can include a series of separate tasks that are part of a routine, or they can be used to teach a new skill by breaking down a single activity into smaller steps.



Example of a visual schedule used to facilitate a daily routine



## Uses for visual schedules

Visual schedules can be used in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings. They can be used as a visual template for a daily routine, or to teach new skills by breaking an activity down into simple steps. Visual schedules are useful for increasing an individual's independence during targeted activities. Specific uses for visual schedules include:

- Improving functional living skills such as cleaning and cooking
- Teaching academic, play, and social skills
- Increasing on-task behavior
- Decreasing tantrums and other disruptive behavior
- Facilitating transitions

## Tips for creating an effective schedule

- Identify the skill or routine you want to target.
- Break the activity into simple steps that the user can easily understand.
- Determine the length of the schedule. While some individuals are able to use a longer schedule that spans the entire day, other users may benefit from using multiple schedules with fewer steps. Choose a length you think will be appropriate for your child and adjust as necessary.
- Select an appropriate visual format for the schedule. Research has found schedules that use photographs, videos, or a combination involving either of these elements to be more effective than schedules that use line drawings or text alone.
- Consider personalizing the schedule by using images of your child successfully completing the steps of each activity.
- Teach your child how to follow the schedule. Many individuals require physical or verbal guidance to follow the schedule and complete activities appropriately, particularly when they are first introduced to the schedule. As the child learns how to follow the schedule, these prompts can be faded.
- Include a way for the child to indicate when steps have been completed, such as filling in a check box or moving images from the "to do" side of the schedule to the "done" side of the schedule.
- If a child struggles to master a specific step within the schedule, consider simplifying the step further by breaking it down into smaller parts.
- Provide reinforcement when your child completes the schedule appropriately. This could be praise, a treat, time to engage in a preferred activity, or anything else that motivates your child!

# Resources for creating visual schedules

The following list includes several websites and apps that can be used to create personalized visual schedules. Additionally, a sample schedule is included following this list that can be customized and printed.

## APPS:

- **Children with Autism: A Visual Schedule App for Apple Watch (\$12.99):** An app that can be easily accessed via Apple Watch. Schedules can be created using 14 default event icons relating to school and home, or customized with your own photos. The app provides the child with cues indicating what activity they are currently doing, how long the scheduled activity will take, how much time is left for the activity, when to get ready to transition, and when the next activity will begin.
- **Choiceworks (\$6.99):** An app for building your own daily schedule using over 180 images and audio clips, or custom audio clips recorded by the user. Choiceworks includes a setting to have your phone or tablet read the schedule aloud. The app allows users to create multiple profiles for multiple individuals and create an unlimited number of schedule boards that can be printed and used non-electronically. In addition to the visual schedule features, the app also includes features to teach waiting skills and emotions.
- **First Then Visual Supports (\$9.99 Basic, \$14.99 HD format with extra features):** An app that allows users to create a variety of visual supports, including “first, then” boards, visual schedules, task analyses, social stories, and visual models. Visual supports can be created using photos taken on your device, images found on the internet, or stock images provided by the app. The app includes multiple templates to choose from or the option to create your own format.
- **DayCape - Daily Visual Planning (free):** An app designed to help children understand structure and time. The app displays images of events along with what time each event will occur. Parents or teachers can use their own device to add events that will show up on the child’s device.

- **My Routine Schedule (\$4.99):** An app that allows you to build visual schedules using stock images from the app or use your own photos. There is a voice recorder feature to add sounds to each step, as well as a timer feature to set a time limit for each step. Users can pause, repeat, or skip schedule steps, or lock the screen so the child cannot alter the schedule.
- **My Visual Schedule Lite (free):** An app designed for iPads that allows users to create daily schedules for multiple users. Users can customize schedules by selecting photos or symbols and adding auditory output to each schedule step.
- **Picture Me Calm (\$2.99):** An app that allows users to create unlimited schedules, designed to reduce children's anxiety surrounding routines. Users can customize schedules with photos of their child performing activities. Children are rewarded for completing schedules via a sticker chart feature.
- **See Time Visual Calendar (\$1.99):** An app to help children conceptualize how much time is left until an event happens, or how much time remains until an event is finished. Users can create a customized list of events and input the corresponding amount of time. The time remaining for each event is displayed in a visual chart that updates as time passes.
- **Visual Schedule HD (\$3.99):** An app that allows users to create customized visual schedules using their own photos and audio recordings. A list of photos appear in order along with corresponding audio clips that play when touched. When each step in the schedule is completed, the user can press the "done" button and it will disappear from the list. The app allows users to save and reuse old schedules or create new ones.
- **Visual Schedule Planner (\$14.99):** An app that allows users to create visual schedules and calendars. Users can view events by day, week, or month. The app includes custom images and sounds as well as a checklist feature, a timer for completing schedules, and reminders. Additionally, the app includes video modeling clips to demonstrate how steps in the schedule should be performed.

## WEBSITES:

- **abaresources.com** : A website with several free printable schedule templates. The website also includes links for other practical products, tips for families, and an interactive message board.
- **buildingblox.net** : A website with free printable images that can be used to create a visual schedule. The website also has a printable “first, then” schedule board as well as other printable resources.
- **child-autism-parent-cafe.com** : A website with several printable examples of visual schedules. The website also includes additional information and resources for families of children with autism.
- **connectability.ca** : A website that allows users to create customized visual aids including visual activity schedules. Users can choose how many images to include in a sequence and how the images will be organized on the page.
- **do2learn.com** : A website that provides tips and allows users to build their own visual schedules. The website includes some free resources as well as extra features for purchase. Features are organized by the suggested age of target users.
- **schkidules.com** : This website provides multiple formats of magnetic visual schedules for purchase, as well as categorized packets of images (school, home, emotions, etc.) to use with the schedules.
- **visualaidsforlearning.com** : A website with free printable images, organized by theme, that can be used to build visual schedules. The website also includes a list of books geared towards parents of children with autism and Down Syndrome.
- **visuals.autism.net** : A website with printable blank schedules as well as printable images that can be used to customize schedule templates. The website also includes videos with tips for creating schedules. All resources are available in both English and French.

# DAILY SCHEDULE

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