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Visual Schedules for Daily Routines

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The importance of maintaining daily routines both in the home and at school is very important for young children. Many families with children participate in a number of activities each day. Unfamiliar activities in daily routines may lead some children to experience stress. It is important to teach young children daily routines and promote carryover into the classroom setting.

Routines in the Home

Developing routines in the home prepares a child for school and promotes a sense of security. Using visual aids to reinforce daily routines is beneficial to children. Since a child understands long before he/she can express himself, using visual aids allows a child to make choices at an early age.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, and Snacks:

It is important to schedule meals and snacks at the same time each day. Keeping a child on a routine for mealtime helps to establish a sense of order and aids in digestion. For visual reinforcement, make a large schedule from poster board and use Velcro® to attach symbols for meals and snacks. If the time changes, be sure to move the symbol and discuss the change with the child.



Bedtime and Naptime:

Being consistent with a child's bedtime and naptime will make these sometimes trying times easier on both you and your child. Keeping a visual schedule of symbols representing bedtime and naptime routines will help the child understand this daily routine. If you need to change these times, be sure to move the symbol on the schedule and discuss the change with the child.



Playtime and Television:

Create a visual schedule using realistic icons (pictures) or use commercially available sets to represent your child's favorite activities and/or television programs.



Homework:

When a child reaches school age, include a time for homework within the visual schedule for homework to help a child adjust to this task. Make sure to schedule a time when both you and your child have the time to work together to complete the assignments.



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Weekend Changes:

Weekends are full of activities that will change the child's schedule. It is important to prepare a child for these changes. One method to highlight the different schedule is to change the color of the scheduling board for the weekend (i.e., change from white to colored poster board). Just like during the week, change the pictures to resemble the day's activities. Incorporate in trips, visits, and bedtime changes.



Routines at School

Although many children don't need visual schedules to help them throughout the day, some children benefit from the visual reinforcement and the announcement of any changes in the daily routine.

If a visual schedule is not in the child's classroom, you can add school activities to your existing home schedule or make an additional school schedule out of different color poster board. It may also be a good idea to create a notebook-sized schedule to carry around for reference throughout the day. Use different pictures to illustrate each subject and/or activity. To help promote a sense of stability and familiarity for the child use the same pictures every time.

Unexpected Events:

Things will happen that are not common to the typical schedule! Handle these changes two ways. If you can change the schedule before the event, do so while explaining to the child what is going to happen. If this is not possible, change the schedule after the event and, explain the change to the child what he/she will miss from the original schedule.



Effective implementation of a school schedule requires working closely with the teacher and following the class schedule. Include any special events like class pictures, assemblies, or field trips. You should include any disruption in the normal routine and discuss it with the child at the start of the school day.

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