Take a Look!
Visual Supports for Learning

Teachers help children learn in many ways. They use examples, teach specific routines, and provide verbal explanations. Some young children, including children with disabilities or those who are learning English, need additional supports. They may not understand what is being said if the speech is too fast, is unclear, or uses unfamiliar words. Children may become confused or feel anxious and overwhelmed. These feelings can affect a child’s ability to learn, interact with others, and feel comfortable as a member of the classroom community.

Visual supports, such as photos, drawings, objects, gestures, and print and environmental cues, can help. They are sometimes paired with verbal explanations. They help children know what to do, learn new skills, and feel included. Visual strategies are considerate of diverse learners. They support children who are visual learners and rely on the visual as a key to understanding the spoken word. Some children may need additional time to process what is being said and come up with a response. Visual supports provide additional prompts to help these children understand discussions. The supports remain on view as a reminder of what was said. Visual supports can also communicate messages to families, especially families whose home language is not English.

Visual supports help children understand . . .

1. Where to find things and where things belong.

   Use visual cues that match children’s developmental and learning needs.

   • At the beginning of the year, create shelf labels with a larger image and smaller font (but still large enough for children to see well).
   • As the year progresses, consider switching to larger text and smaller images.
   • By the end of the year, try using text labels only, with children helping to create or write the labels.

2. What will happen and when.

   Keep these points in mind when creating picture schedules.

   • Model the use of picture schedules as part of the daily routine. Post the schedules where children can easily see and use them.
   • Match text labels with images, using the words most commonly used in your program to describe that activity. For example, if group time is called circle time, use those exact words.
   • Use a flexible system with movable images representing snack, circle time, and so on. This lets you show and discuss changes to routines, transitions, special events, or visitors.
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3. What to do and how to do it.


- When breaking down complex activities into steps, decide if a simpler or more detailed visual will help children master the task. Use images that are clear, uncluttered representations. Have an adult try out the directions before using the visual with children.

- Step-by-step directions may require a lot of teacher involvement initially. Read each step aloud or point as children complete the action. As they master the tasks or can read or review steps independently, provide less direction. Remove the supports when they are no longer needed as a reference.

- Displays can help children review their work and explain a classroom activity to family members or other classroom visitors.
4. How to interact with others.

Offer visual supports to children who need help making friends and successfully interacting with others.

- Create stories that use images with words to provide scripts, or offer video models of appropriate behavior for children to follow in social situations. Photos of children leaning toward each other and making eye contact can show, not just tell, children how to talk and play with peers.

- Provide visual supports that help children focus on and recognize the feelings and perspectives of others, such as feelings faces posters.

5. How to communicate thoughts, feelings, and choices.

Use visual supports to help children communicate.

- Choice boards show children what is available to them. They can select an activity based on the visual information on the board. Start with fewer choices. Add more options or complexity later as children are able to manage them.

- Post images that represent “survival phrases,” such as I am hungry, I am tired, and I need to go to the bathroom. Children can point to these images to communicate their basic needs.
Help Children Bloom

DIAL™-4 and PLS™-5:
Cost-effective, Valid, and Reliable Assessments

Little sprouts blossom into beautiful, healthy flowers when given nourishment and care from a tender young age. In the same manner, the growth of young children depends on weeding out developmental issues early, so that these little ones can thrive and reach their full potential.

With our two new assessments—updated versions of familiar, widely used, trusted tests—you can easily evaluate even the youngest children for developmental delay. DIAL-4, a universal screener, can now be used with children as young as 2:6 years. PLS-5 offers streamlined assessment, provides more in-depth language evaluation, and can be administered starting at birth.

Both assessments help you increase positive outcomes for the young ones you serve and help them flourish!