

SETTING UP A PICTURE SCHEDULE SYSTEM

WHAT IS A PICTURE SCHEDULE SYSTEM?

A picture schedule represents each activity in the student's day using photographs or pictures as tangible symbols. The symbols can be photographs or pictures [these pictures could be magazine pictures, line drawings, Picture Communication Symbol (PCS) or any other pictures (color or black & white) depending on the student's ability to identify the picture]. The picture needs to be one that the student will be able to associate with the intended message.

WHY USE A PICTURE SCHEDULE SYSTEM?

- To provide specific information about what will happen next and to ease transitions from one activity to the next.
- To provide an overview of the sequence of activities within a student's day in an effort to provide structure, foster security, and reduce the student's "confusion".
- To provide clear visual strategies (in addition to auditory instructions only) for a student who needs the additional visual input and to help move toward more independence and self-management.
- To serve as one part of a behavioural support plan for a student who has a high need for predictability.
- To provide an organized way for the student to get to meaningful vocabulary.
- To give a student an opportunity to be a more active participant.
- To introduce the student to the concept of symbolization (the idea that the photo or picture can stand for an actual activity).

HOW DO YOU ORGANIZE A PICTURE SCHEDULE SYSTEM?

1. Identify the student's daily schedule at home, school, and in the community. This schedule should include all of the activities the student does every day. Make a list of all the student's daily activities in order as they occur.
2. Identify a photograph or picture that represents each of these activities. The student should recognize these symbols as relevant to the activity.
3. Take the photographs (use a good camera for photographs that are clear, large and uncluttered). If you are using pictures, find, make or cut out pictures representing each of the activities in the schedule. For example, a photo of a brush might represent morning grooming activities, a picture of a painting with paintbrush might represent paint time.

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4. Collect these pictures in one place (a large envelope, a box, or a page with Velcro) so that they are readily available. The same photographs or pictures should represent the activities every time.
5. Construct a "display" for the schedule system. You can place the photographs or pictures in a series arranged in a left-to-right or top-to-bottom order. The "display" can take many forms such as a photo album, hard paper, or soft board cut to a size to take the pictures with some space between. The student or adult partner should easily be able to remove the pictures so Velcro is often used. The display should provide good contrast – black or dark blue is often used to provide a contrasting background color if the picture is a light colour. Place the photographs or pictures into the "displays" laid out in order to represent the first 2 to 4 (or more) activities of the day. The number of activities represented on the schedule depends on the student and the environment. Sometimes a simple "First...Then" Schedule is used in the beginning. The "First" picture is usually the "work" or non-preferred activity, with the "Then" picture always being a preferred activity (similar to a reinforcement schedule). The display is mounted in a central location. E.g.,

FIRST	THEN
Writing	Blow bubbles

OR

1	2	3	4
Circle time	Journal	Clean up	Free play

6. Devise a simple system for identifying finished activities. This system may consist of putting a big X on the back of each photo or picture so that the student can turn the picture over and put it back in the display when the activity is completed. If the original picture is replicated on the back with an X over it, it will be easier for the student to see what activities have been finished. An alternate system can consist of a "finished box" into which the student deposits each photograph or picture after finishing the activity.

An example of a picture schedule system using 4 pictures to represent the 4 routine activities follows. Activities represented by this example remind the student to... 1. Put sweater and hat away 2. Go to the bathroom 3. Set the table 4. Play with a ball (most favorite activity (ball) – usually comes LAST)

Picture of sweater and hat in closet. 1	Picture of a toilet, sink and towel. 2	Picture of table with plates, cutlery & cups. 3	Picture of a ball the same colour as student's favorite. 4
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HOW DO YOU USE A PICTURE SCHEDULE SYSTEM?

A schedule system is used in loosely structured naturalistic environments – at home, school, in the community – with a hierarchy of prompts that are gradually faded.

1. At the beginning of each “set” of 2 to 6 activities, you should briefly introduce these activities in the order that the routines are to occur - a structured schedule of routines – no choices here. This provides an “overview” of the upcoming sequence of activities.
2. Before each activity, you should prompt the student to go to the schedule system. The student selects the symbol for the first activity. You may need to begin by identifying the symbol and follow a hierarchy of prompts that are gradually faded.
3. Take the photographs or pictures to the related activity and use it during the activity. This will help the student make the connection between the symbol and the activity. This task will be easier to accomplish if the student follows the same routine daily and can anticipate these routines.
4. When the activity is completed, the student should turn the symbol over or put the symbol in the “finished box”. The finished symbols should be easily accessible to the student at all times. In this way, the student has the option of going to these symbols and choosing a symbol of an activity that has been completed if he wants to ask to do that activity again. This is a way of giving the student meaningful vocabulary. If this ever happens, partners should make every attempt to respond to the student’s request and let the student do the activity the symbol represent, if at all possible!

It is important to return to the schedule system after each activity is finished and to select the next symbol before each activity. Repetition of this routine will help the student to learn the usefulness of the schedule system. With repetition, the student should learn the routine of going to the schedule after each activity is done to see what he is to do next. Eventually the student will be able to do this independently and without nagging.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT THE STUDENT UNDERSTANDS THE IDEA OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS OR PICTURE SCHEDULE SYSTEM?

Positive signs that might indicate that the student is making the connection between a symbol and the activity it represents include:

- The student takes a symbol and then goes to the area where the activity typically occurs.
- The student smiles or laughs when he picks up a symbol for something he likes to do.
- The student resists taking a symbol, throwing it away or making a negative facial expression when she sees a symbol of something she doesn’t like to do.

Note: If the student is not showing progress with pictures, try stepping back and using objects that represent each activity instead of pictures or photos. It is always important that the task be at the student’s ability level and that they are able to feel success.