A GUIDE TO VISUAL SUPPORT
INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION

The Halton Resource Connection

"Telling stories with visuals is an ancient art. We've been drawing pictures on cave walls for centuries. It's like what they say about the perfect picture book. The art and the text stand alone, but together, they create something even better. Kids who need to can grab onto those graphic elements and find their way into the story."
-Deborah Wiles

WHAT ARE VISUALS?

A visual support is any visual element that aids in conveying information more effectively. This can include images, charts, diagrams, videos, any visual media, gestures, and facial expressions that help clarify or emphasize the message being communicated.

Images

Charts

Diagrams

Written Information

Tangible Objects

Facial Expressions

Body Language

Gestures

WHY VISUALS?

Visual supports enhance communication by providing additional context, making abstract concepts more concrete, and supporting memory retention.

Visuals also support in:

- Inclusive Environments
- Strong Relationships
- Information Processing
- Receptive and Expressive Communication
- Active Participation
- Curiosity and Exploration
- Emotional and Psychological Safety
- Physical and Mental Health

All of these contribute to the four foundations of How Does Learning Happen?

Belonging · **Engagement** · **Expression** · **Well-Being**

Children Families Educators
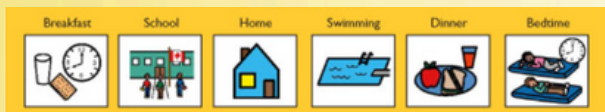
Visual schedules: Visual representations of the day's activities, often using pictures or icons to represent different times and tasks.
These help individuals understand and anticipate the sequence of events throughout the day.

Routine strips or Task Analysis: These break down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps, each accompanied by a visual representation.
This helps individuals understand and follow each step sequence, ensuring tasks are completed correctly.
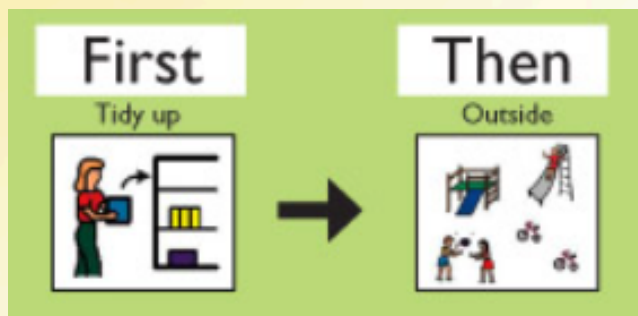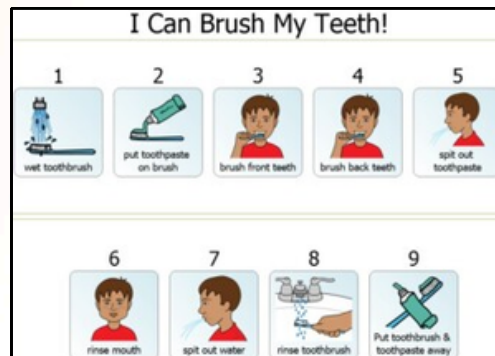
First...Then boards: Simple visual aids that display two activities or steps: one that must be completed first, followed by a subsequent activity. Often used to motivate individuals by showing a preferred activity that follows a less preferred one (e.g., "First tidy up then go outside).

Choice Boards: Provide a visual selection of options, allowing individuals to choose from a set of activities or tasks. This promotes autonomy and decision-making skills.
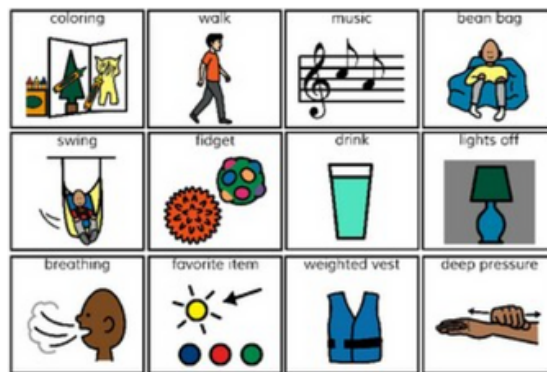
Visual Tags: Support children's understanding of directions. These visuals are easily accessible (as educators typically wear them) and give children a visual sense of what the educators are asking. i.e., sit down, line up, bathroom time, etc. Any direction that educators give children can be made into a visual, and these can be personalized and arranged in any order based on the needs of classroom**.**

Communication Boards (PECS): PECS use pictures to help non-verbal individuals communicate their needs and desires by exchanging images for items or activities. This helps individuals express themselves in a way that others understand to build relationships.

PECS are only available through a Speech and Language Therapist and to be implemented with Professional training.

Social Narratives: Short narratives with pictures that explain social situations, behaviours, and expectations. Helping individuals understand and navigate social interactions.

When creating or using visual supports it is important to have an understanding of basic principles to implement them effectively.

✓ **Assessment of abilities**
  -Evaluate each individual's strengths, challenges, and preferences.
  -Tailor visual supports to their specific needs.
  -Develop with the current skill set, and level of understanding of the individual.

✓ **Relevance**
  -Ensure visual supports directly relate to the individual's daily routines, tasks, and activities. For example, a visual schedule should reflect the individual's activities.

✓ **Clarity**
  -Provide clear, step-by-step instructions or cues, -Clear texts or pictures and the right amount of information to avoid confusion.
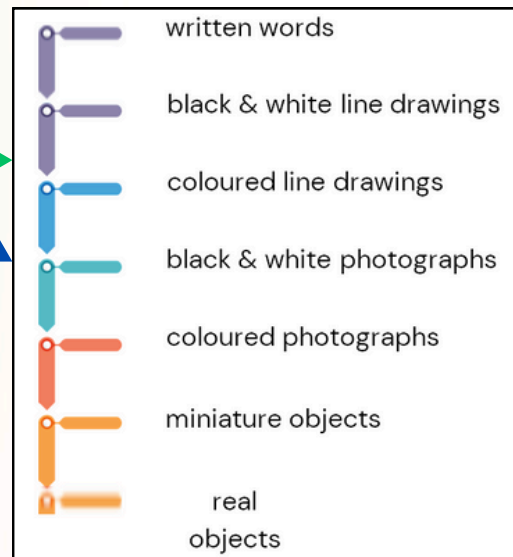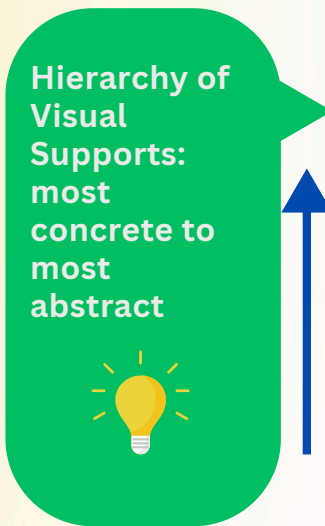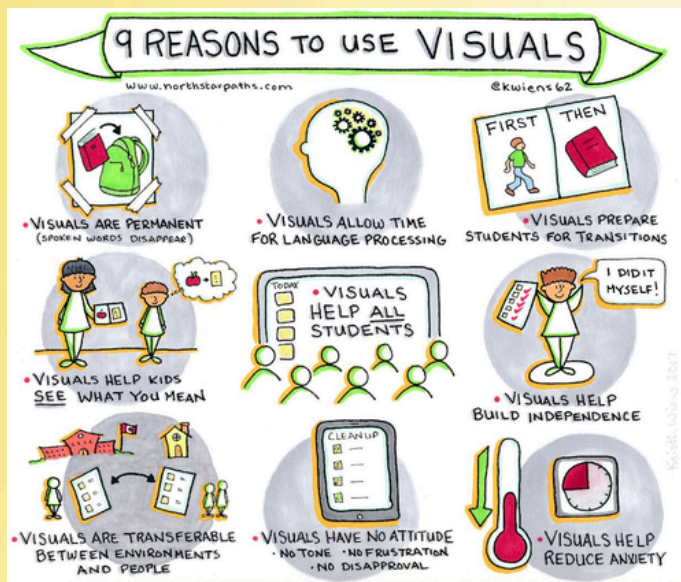
✓ **Consistency**
  -Consistency can reinforce routines and reduce anxiety by providing a predictable structure.
  - Use of the same visuals for specific behaviours will help reinforce learning and understanding.

✓ **Accessibility**
 -Individuals should have access to visual support especially when they are for communication.

9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS

www.northstarpaths.com @kwiens62

- VISUALS ARE PERMANENT (SPOKEN WORDS DISAPPEAR)
- VISUALS ALLOW TIME FOR LANGUAGE PROCESSING
- VISUALS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR TRANSITIONS
- VISUALS HELP KIDS SEE WHAT YOU MEAN
- VISUALS HELP ALL STUDENTS
- VISUALS HELP BUILD INDEPENDENCE — I DID IT MYSELF!
- VISUALS ARE TRANSFERABLE BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE
- VISUALS HAVE NO ATTITUDE · NO TONE · NO FRUSTRATION · NO DISAPPROVAL
- VISUALS HELP REDUCE ANXIETY

Hierarchy of Visual Supports: most concrete to most abstract

- written words
- black & white line drawings
- coloured line drawings
- black & white photographs
- coloured photographs
- miniature objects
- real objects

How will you incorporate these strategies into daily practice to support diverse learners?

TIPS FOR USING VISUALS

✔ Pair a verbal prompt with when using visuals. Hearing the language and seeing the visual simultaneously, help to form associations and build language skills.

✔ Like any other communication, getting to a child's eye level to use a visual will be most effective.

✔ Use written text and visuals to promote literacy and ensure everyone uses the same language. ex: if the visual says "group time", all educators should use the term group time instead of "circle" or "gathering time."

✔ Be patient. Implementing any new strategy takes time to become effective. Once you start using a visual, use it consistently throughout the day and with all children.

How can caregivers, educators, and professionals work together to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of visual supports?

MORE INFO
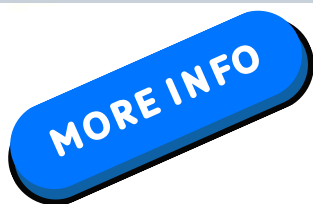
Long Story Shortz - Visuals

5 MM Special Edition: Visuals

Using Visual Support for Early Childhood Programs: Part One

Create Your Own Visuals: Connectability Visuals Engine

THRC RESOURCE LIBRARY OFFERS PRE-MADE VISUAL SUPPORTS FOR THE HALTON COMMUNITY. FIND THEM HERE!

BOOK AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE RL STAFF TO CREATE PERSONALIZED VISUALS THAT FIT YOUR NEEDS!

connect@thrc.ca   905-875-4600 ext. 101