Using Visuals to Enhance Play:

# Helping Non-Verbal and Quiet Children Engage in Play with Peers

Introduction

My name is Krista Reid. I am a K–6 qualified educator with 18 years experience in Northern Ontario with a Special Education Specialist. Throughout my career I have taught all grades except grade 3. Since the pandemic, I moved from mainstream classes to a self–contained autism class for kindergarten students. This year I am teaching a mainstream split kindergarten and grade 1 class, but I have brought some of autistic students with me.

I am passionate about using visuals to help students.

In this session I will talk about the importance of visuals, what they are, why they are needed and how to begin using them in your spaces.

What is a visual?

Simply stated, a visual is ANY image that adds to/or replaces printed language in your classroom or education space. It can be a real photograph, a logo, a cartoon, a clipart, an object, or a symbol from programs like Boardmaker or Smarty Symbols. A visual is **NOT** PECS. PECS stands for "picture exchange communication system". This is a way to help non-speaking ASD students communicate. This system is being replaced by the vast number of electronic options that are available and because of its insistence on students making eye contact. You may also hear the term, "PCS" – Picture communication symbols – I simply just like to call them visuals.
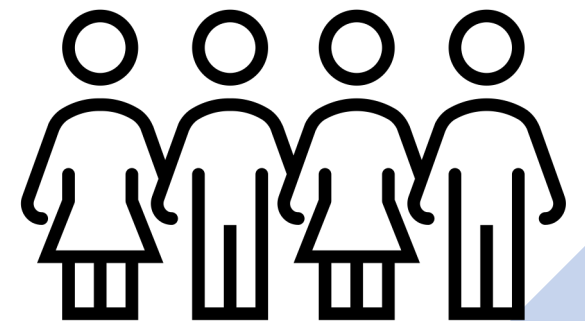
Why are visuals needed?

Children with ASD are often visual learners. As well, they often need <u>more</u> processing time than neurotypical children. Spoken words "disappear", but visual supports can be there for as long as needed. The visual information is there as long as needed. Children with ASD process information in a very different way than neurotypical students. Speaking loudly or speaking slowly is not necessarily going to help them understand. A visual with the verbal has been shown by research to be one of the most effective ways to help children with ASD navigate education spaces.

BUT, visuals don't just help autistic students. They are also key in helping very shy students and multi language learners. And in my opinion, visuals help **ALL** students.

No licking

Washroom

Say "Good morning"
Good morning

123 ABC
Activities

Mrs. Reid's Room

Using Visuals to Build Independence & Self Regulation

If you have a child who is non-verbal or non-speaking, having visuals available will help them build independence in your education space. When non-verbal or non-speaking children are very young, they usually haven't found an ACC device that works for them yet. They depend on visuals to help them express their basic needs. Having visuals available that allow them to ask for needs like the washroom and drinks will help build their independence and confidence. These can be on board in the space, in a binder, or on a lanyard the child wears; as long as they are easily accessible.
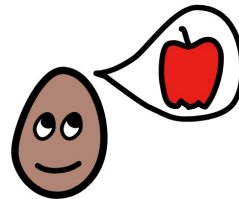
Toilet   Drink   Hungry   Help please

Using Visuals to Build Independence & Self Regulation

Visuals can be helpful in guiding your students through self regulation. They can be reminders to breath, options for a break, or an emotions check in.
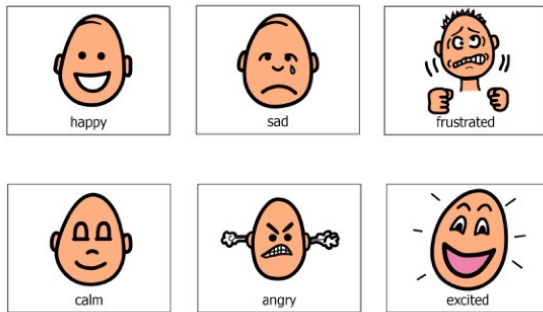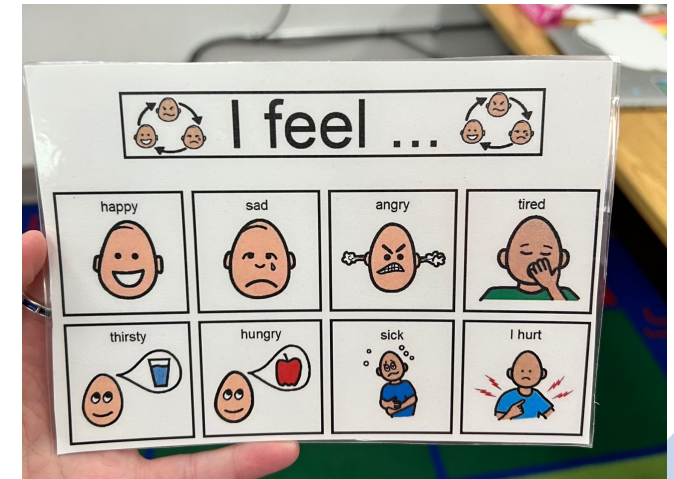
Using Visuals to Facilitate Social Communication in Play

Using visuals to help children navigate the social communication necessary for interactive play is important. Having visuals available that express "Can I have a turn" for example, will help students "use their words" when playing with peers. These can be set up at different play stations (indoors or out) or can be on a key chain or lanyard that the student or educator wears.
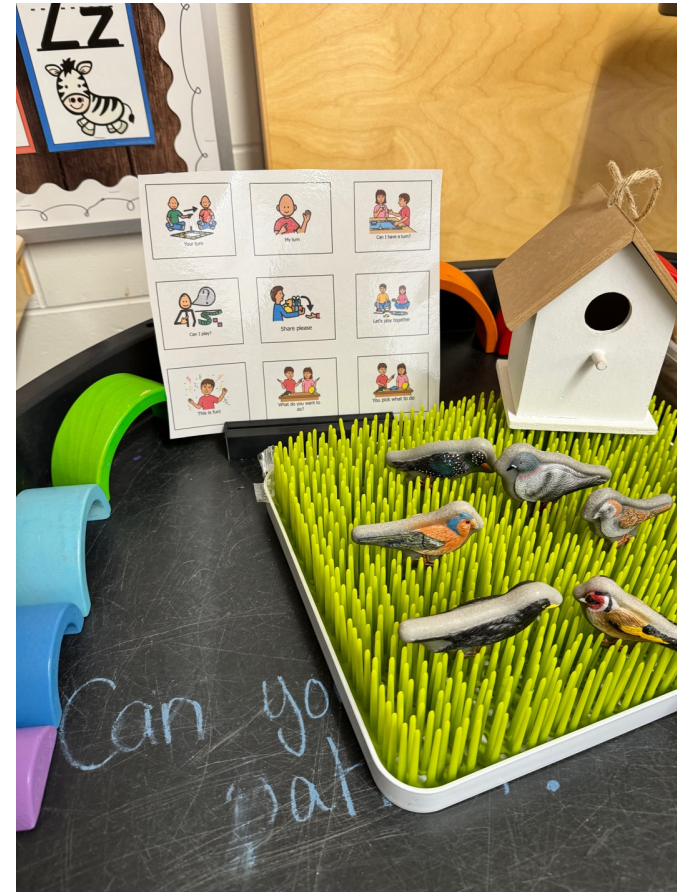
Using Visuals to Facilitate Social Communication in Play
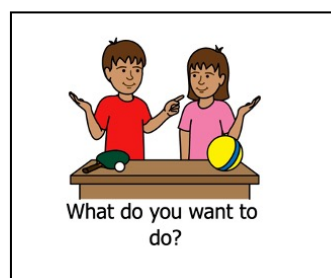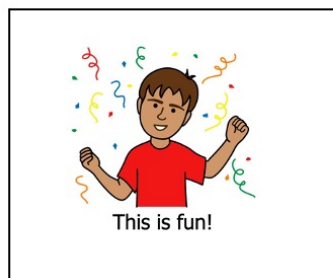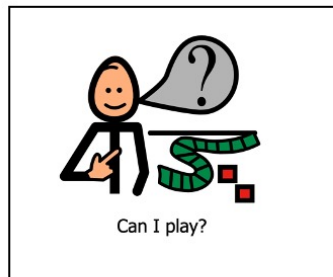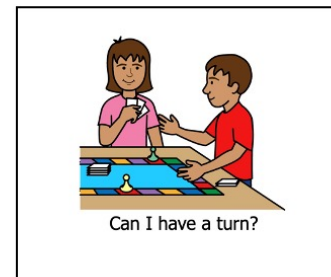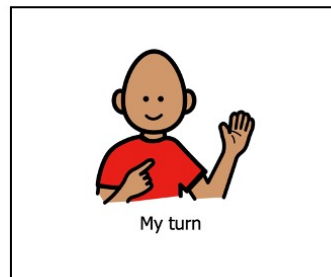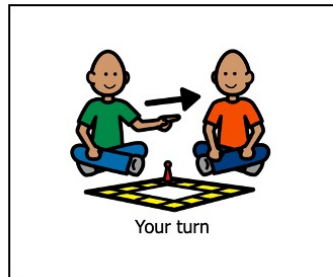
Using Visuals to Facilitate Play in Outdoor Spaces and with Sensory Materials

Using visuals to help children navigate play outside and with sensory materials is best with photographs of the materials and spaces. Most software programs that make visuals are too general for what happens in these spaces.
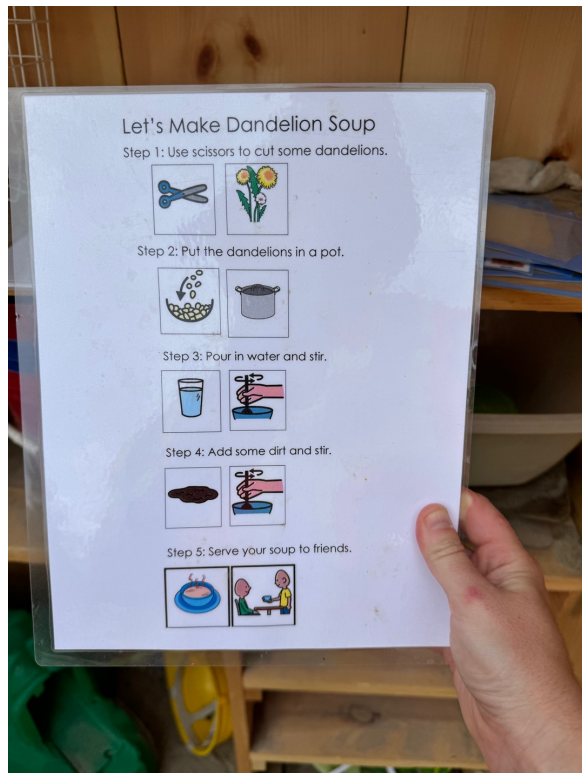
Using Visuals to Aid in Transitions

A digital or visual timer of some sort will be your best friend when helping a child with ASD transition from one activi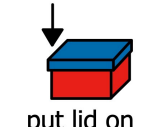ty to another. If your play space runs on a schedule, there may be times when you need to have a student move to another activity. A timer will give them a visual and audio clue that time is up. You can also use a small token as a placeholder for time. I find these most helpful when the transition is not based on a specific time.
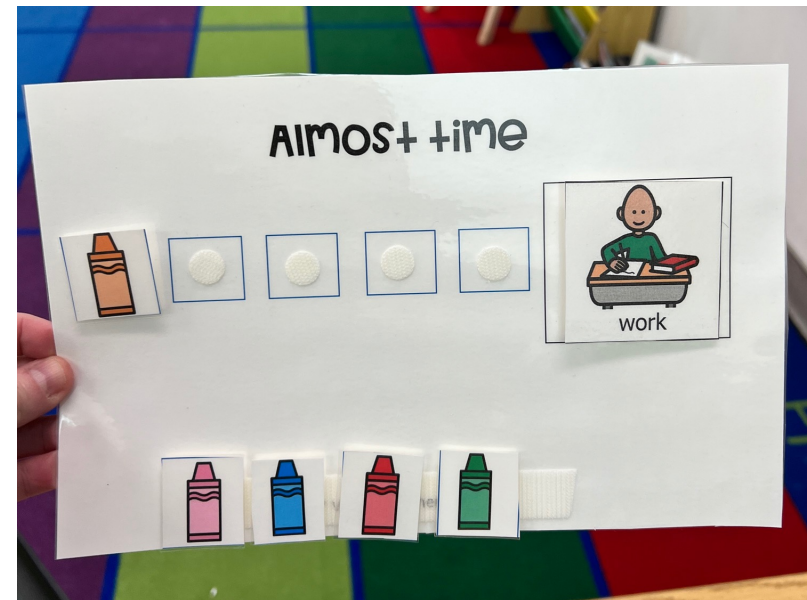
Using Visuals for Expectations

Play space expectations expressed as visuals are important. These will help your children with ASD visualize what is expected of them.

| 😊 I will	❌ I will not
share	throw things
be kind	take from others
clean up	yell
help	dump toys
put lid on containers	hurt others

Using Visuals for Behaviour

You can also use visuals to correct, change or modify behaviours in play spaces. They may be used for a reminder. Educators can post these reminders around the room, at the play space, in a calming corner, or educators may keep these visuals close by in their pocket, or on a lanyard.

Storing Visuals

Visuals can be difficult to keep on hand and ready to go. But a pocket chart system or drawer system might help. I use a tool box and a pocket chart.
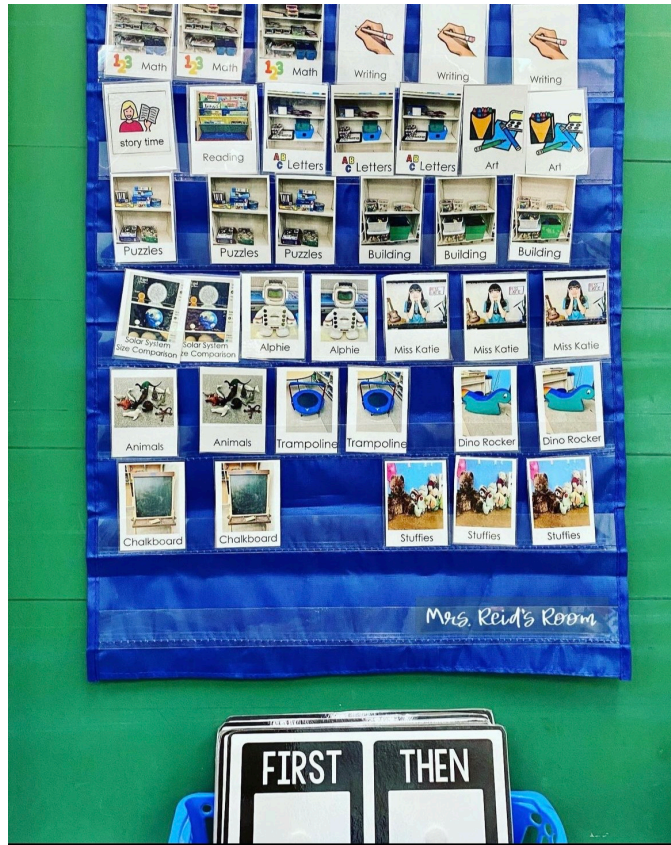
Thank you!

Thank you so much for coming tonight. I hope this information was valuable to you. A big thank you to Emily and the Scholar's Choice team for hosting me! Feel free to find me reach out to me on Instagram or Teachers Pay Teachers.

https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Mrsreidsroom

https://www.instagram.com/mrsreidsroom/