

Visual Training for Understanding

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For most preschoolers, a picture is worth a thousand words. Visual images more easily convey meaning than only using the spoken word. For most children with special needs, particularly those with auditory processing deficiencies, this is especially true. They understand what they see, rather than what they hear. Not only do they struggle to comprehend, but their ability to communicate may also be limited. As a result, behavior problems may emerge.

THE USE OF VISUAL AIDS. Adults who only say "pay attention" will more effectively communicate with children who have auditory processing deficiencies when visual aids are added. Showing a child an object, a photo or a picture symbol helps the child understand the spoken message. For those children, visual information can be an effective organizational tool that helps them understand expectations, routines, transitions and consequences of their behavior.

Props are powerful prompts; they show the child what to expect. The object itself is a visual reminder that tells the child what will happen next; a bowl, spoon and cereal can help a child know that breakfast is ready. Pictures of a coat, hat and mittens indicate that the child will be going outdoors. As the child becomes familiar with routines, the objects and pictures may no longer be needed.

HELP WITH TRANSITIONS. In the classroom, visual schedules can show the sequence of the day's activities, starting with a photo of the school bus, then the building or classroom, for example. Other important props that promote communication are "choice boards" (e.g., show me what you want), relying upon those most common and easily recognized items that help a child become familiar with scheduled activities and transitions at school and at home.

As children learn to respond to pictures in a meaningful way, their ability to understand verbal messages is often greatly enhanced and their language skills may improve. As communication skills develop, children learn to use words to express their feelings, needs and emotions in a more socially appropriate manner. This often leads to the development of new skills and improved behavior in school and at home.

