Hello Everyone!

If you've seen me wandering around your schools, then you have probably caught me talking about visual schedules again. I have a small fear that my tombstone will read, "*Here lies Lori. When you run into her in heaven she will still be asking to see your visual schedule*." Many teachers you are called to consult with will understand how to make visual schedules. Not all will understand how to make them work. For the purpose of this discussion, I am referring to the individual visual schedule that guides a student through his entire day, not overall classroom schedules or activity schedules/work systems. Individual schedules are <u>not</u> the only important part of a strong program but they are a building block and usually the first thing that I look at when visiting a classroom. As AIT members and autism consultants you will find yourself being asked to solve classroom problems. That is rarely an easy task and never as simple as just one thing. Checking for errors in schedule implementation is a good place to start. Here are some culprits to watch out for.

1. <u>Schedules that function as choice boards:</u> For schedules to ease anxiety and maintain predictability, they need to be the rule, not a choice. Some students approach their schedule like an all you can eat buffet. "I'll have a little bit of lunch then some computer lab. Nope! No desk work for me today." In that case we usually show only part of the day at one time. For some it may be only the next transition that they see.

2. <u>PECS identity crisis:</u> PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) books and schedules are often both made using boardmaker pictures. A PECS book, however, should never be used as a schedule. PECS facilitates communication. It has a very different function than a schedule does.

3. <u>The visual schedule is not accessible with each transition:</u> "Visual" means the schedule can be seen. A schedule may show the whole day or part of a day. It may travel on a clipboard or inside an agenda. It may be stationary on a desk or on a wall. There are lots of different ways that schedules can be made however all need to be accessible with each transition. If the student is in the gym then the part of his schedule that transitions him needs to be in the gym, not in the classroom.

4. <u>The schedule is being used differently among staff members:</u> Discretely ask more than one person to show you how the visual schedule works. Every staff member should be using the schedule in the exact same way. If not used consistently, the schedule becomes a source of

confusion and complicates transitions even further. If you are confused once they explain it, chances are, someone else is confused also.

5. <u>The schedule doesn't pass the GPS test:</u> A schedule should not do any more for the student than your GPS does for you. It simply tells the student "where to go next". (For example: music, lunch room, desk work, computer lab, sensory area, group time.) If the student's schedule depicts the whole day then he can look down the road and see what turns he will be making later but it should not tell him what to do when he gets there. Imagine your GPS doing that! You're driving through heavy traffic, "In ½ mile merge right to exit 12. Buy a dress shirt to wear to the concert on Saturday night then pick up a gallon of milk on the way home." TMI! (Too much information!) Once the student transitions to the location, an activity schedules or work system is used to tell a student what work and how much work to do.

6. <u>The schedule does not take the student all the way through the transition:</u> For students that are just learning to use schedules or have difficulty transitioning into an area, it is especially important to take them all the way from point A to point B with their schedule. If they are to transition to a desk in the music room then have them take their schedule icon all the way to the desk, not to the door of the music room. When you have a student stop at the door and then go on inside you are adding an extra transition to the process.

7. <u>Responsibilities have not been dictated. Yes, I am suggesting a dictatorship:</u> Schedules will fail if they are not ready when it comes time for the student to transition. It must be determined who will set up and take down the schedule. Take a picture of the completed schedule so there will be no question what it should look like each day. A staff member must also be responsible for making sure changes in the daily routine are indicated. All staff members are responsible for using the schedule as they have been instructed or asking for clarification if they don't understand. I recommend that step by step instructions for using the schedule be written out and put in plain sight for staff members to see.

The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders has developed step by step instructions as well as an implementation checklist for visual schedules. These are a helpful guide when you are out consulting in classrooms. You can access both documents and more information on the evidence behind visual support by going to their site at http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/visual-supports.

Happy reading and safe travels!
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