Teaching Independent Behavior with Activity Schedules to Children with Autism
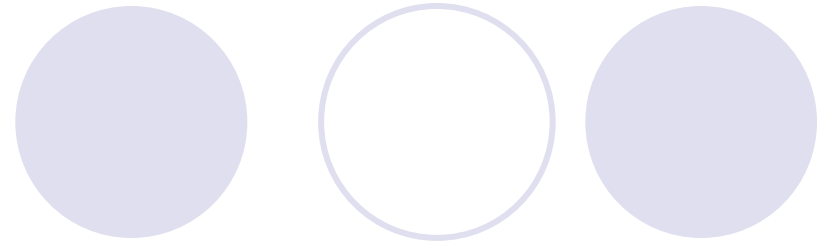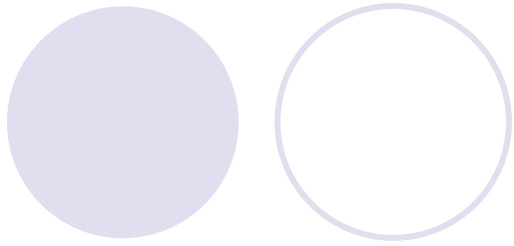
Diane Berger, MA, BCBA

Berger Learning Group, LLC

What is an activity schedule?

An activity schedule is a visual schedule comprised of pictures and/or words that:

- show the sequence of steps needed to complete an activity

- list the occurrences of daily events (daily routine)

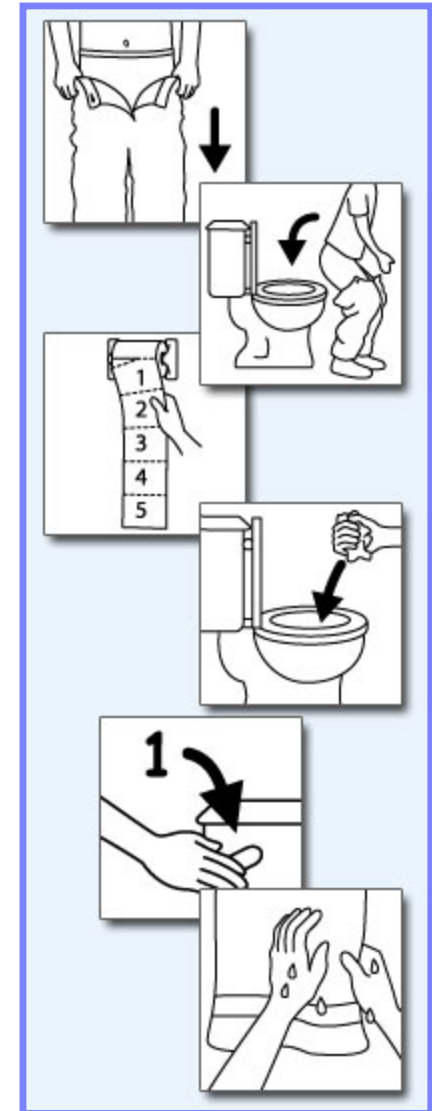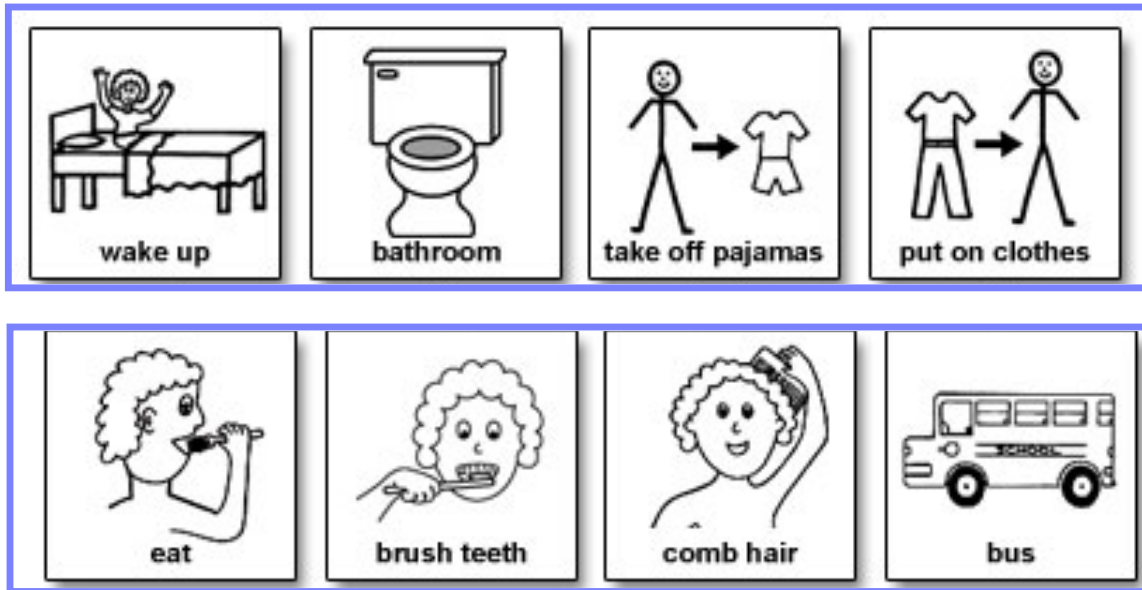- provide structure for unstructured down time (play)
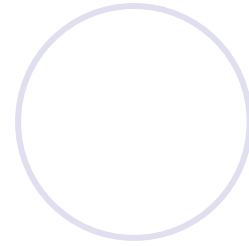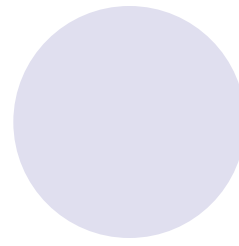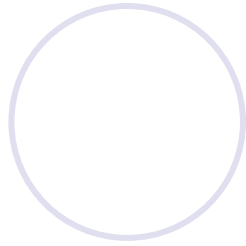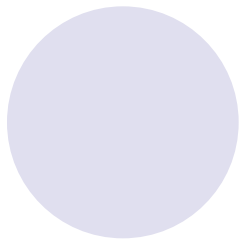
Activity Schedules

Schedules may be pictures only, pictures with text, or just text

This will depend on the child's level of functioning

A picture activity schedule can often be faded to a written schedule as the child learns to read
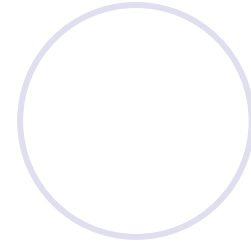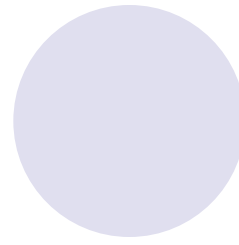
Activity Schedules

wake up | bathroom | take off pajamas | put on clothes

eat | brush teeth | comb hair | bus

Courtesy of www.do2learn.com
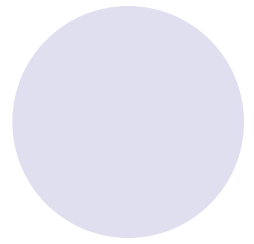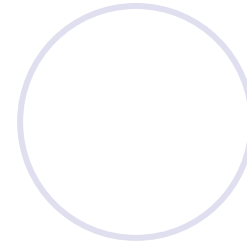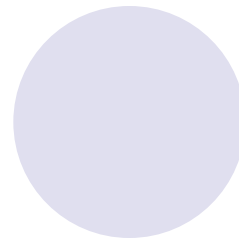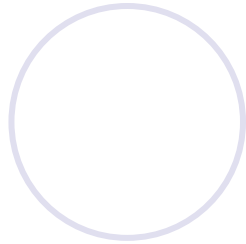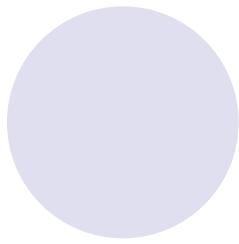
Children with Autism

- Often have poor language/communication skills and exhibit their frustration through inappropriate behaviors (tantrums, crying, hitting, biting, etc.)

- Tend to process visual information better and faster than auditory information

- May have difficulty with transitions
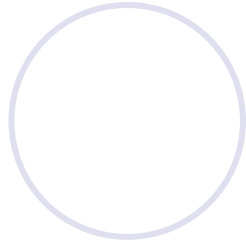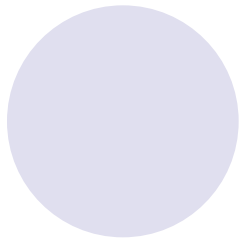
Children with Autism

- Respond well to structure

- Often engage in inappropriate behaviors (including self-stimulatory behaviors – "stimming") during unstructured times

Purpose of Activity Schedules

- To increase on-task behavior

- To decrease inappropriate behaviors

- To facilitate smooth transitions from one activity to the next

- To enhance acquisition of new skills

- To increase independence

- To promote self-management
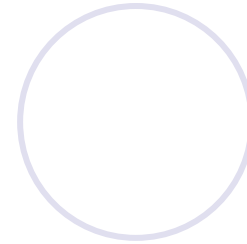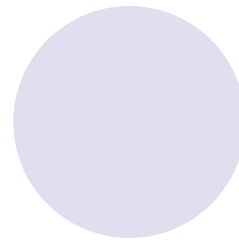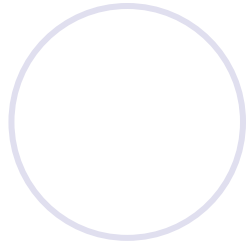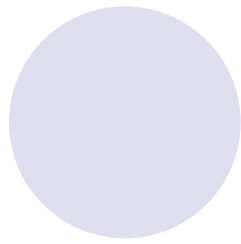
Activity Schedules

Lynn E. McClannahan, L.E. & Krantz, P.J. (1998). Activity schedules for children with autism: Teaching independent behavior. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Bryan, L.C. & Gast, D.L. (2000). Teaching on-task and on-schedule behaviors to high-functioning children with autism via picture activity schedules. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 30,* 553-567.

Dooley, P. (2001). Using an activity schedule to smooth school transitions. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, *3, 57-62.*
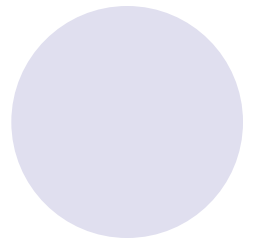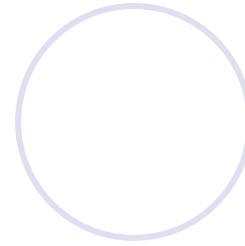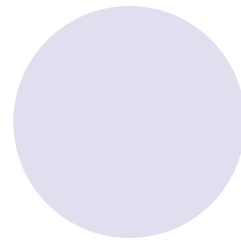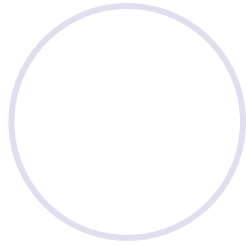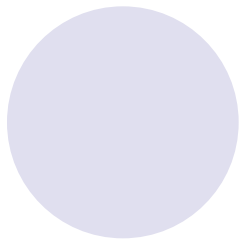
Uses for activity schedules

- Daily living skills – dressing, toileting, handwashing

- Daily schedules – for home and school

- Play skills – to increase independent play
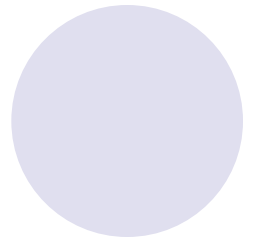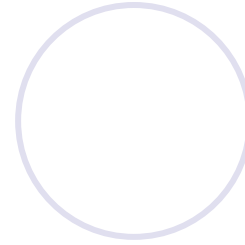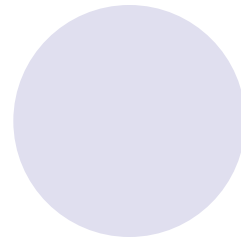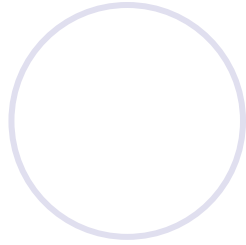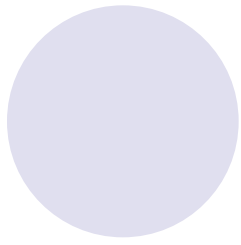
Activity Schedules Across All Ages

Adult use of schedules include:

- "To do" lists ("Reminders" – iPhone, smart phones)
- Microsoft Outlook calendar
- Teachers' lesson plans, agendas
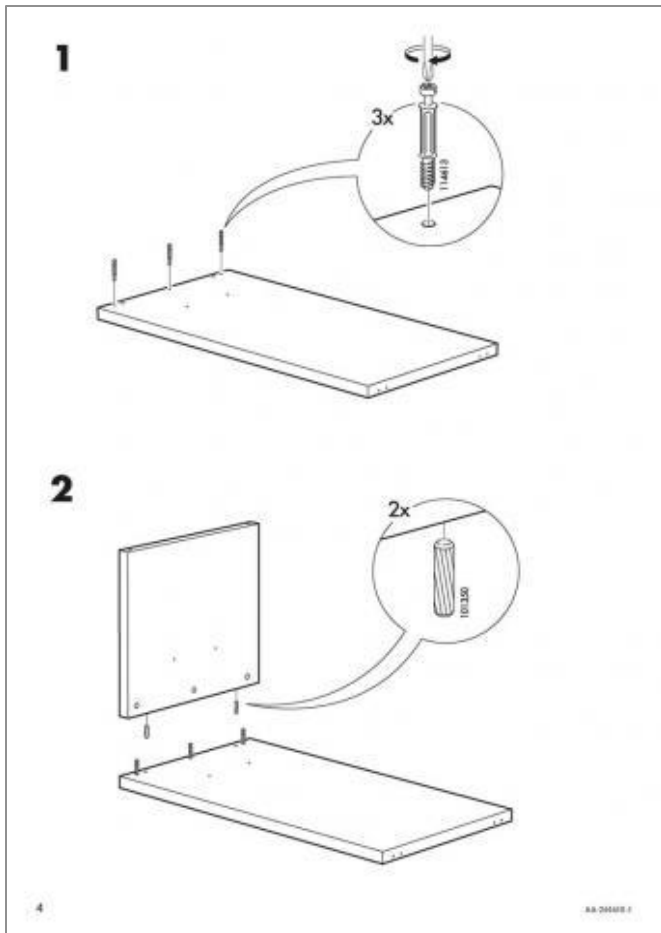
CLASSIC CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

YIELD: 4 DOZEN COOKIES

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 1 cup butter or margarine, softened
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup brown sugar, packed
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 1/4 cups un-sifted flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS

Heat oven to 375ºF. Stir flour with baking soda and salt; set aside. In large mixing bowl, beat butter with sugar and brown sugar at meduim speed until creamy and lightened in color. Add eggs and vanilla, one at a time. Mix on low speed until incorporated. Gradually blend dry mixture into creamed mixture. Stir in nuts and chocolate chips. Drop by tablespoon onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake for 9 to 11 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool and serve.

● Cookbooks, IKEA instructions
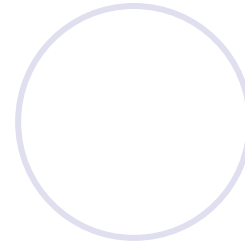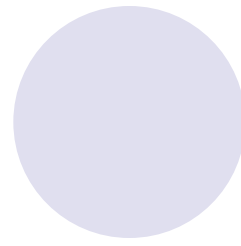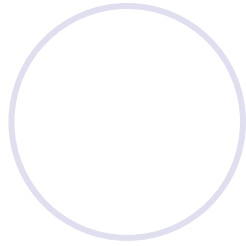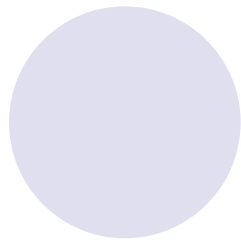
Prerequisites for Activity Schedules

- Match to sample, picture-object correspondence

- Tolerance of manual guidance

- Demonstrated independence with individual skills – *helpful*

Daily Living Skills
~ Toileting ~

1. Pull down pants	2. Go potty	3. Pull up pants	4. Flush toilet	5. Wash hands
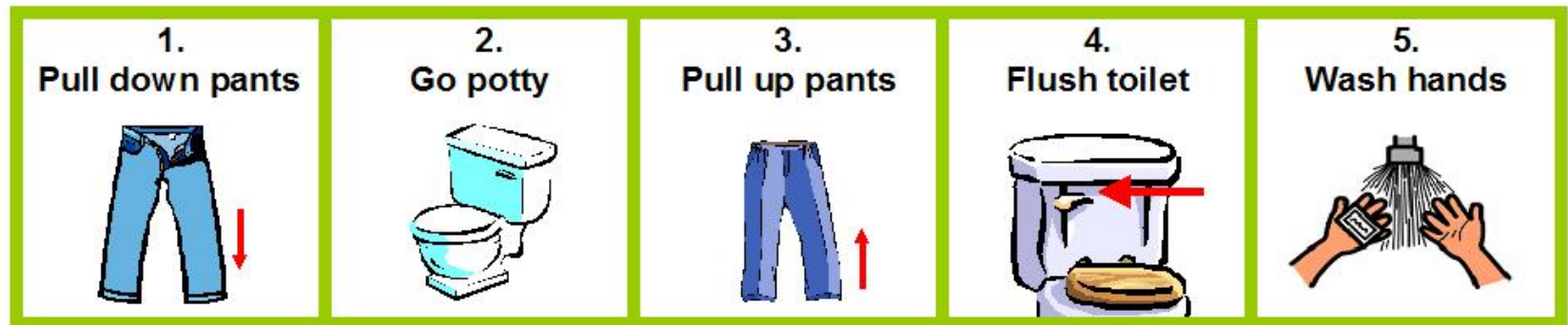
Daily Living Skills
~ Handwashing ~

wash hands
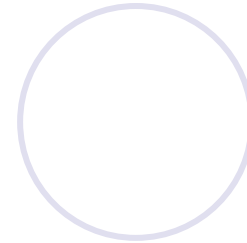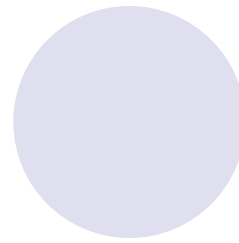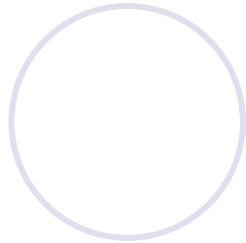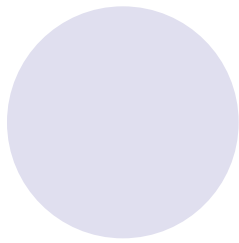
Daily Living Skills
~ Dressing ~

| 1. Take off pajamas | 2. Put on underpants | 3. Put on pants | 4. Put on shirt | 5. Put on socks | 6. Put on shoes |
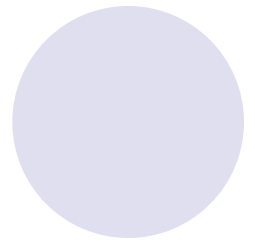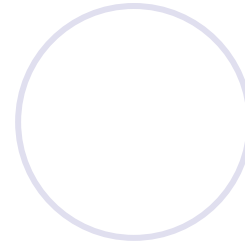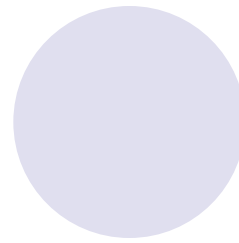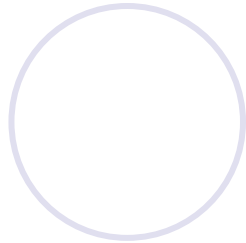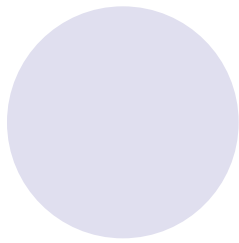
Schedules for Daily Living Skills

- Provide initial instruction
  - "Go get dressed"
  - "Time to brush your teeth"
  - "Wash your hands"

- Begin by prompting ~ prompt at "normal speed"
  - Full physical prompting
  - Graduated guidance
  - Shadow prompting
  - Gestures
  - Fading proximity
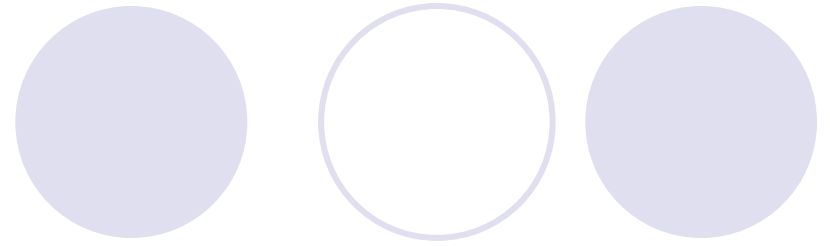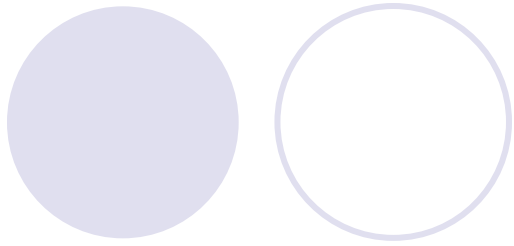
Daily Schedules

- Can be used at home or school

- Facilitate transitions throughout the day

- Promote independent completion of work/ chores
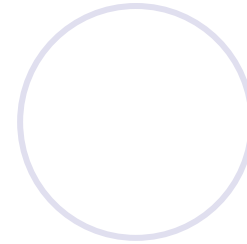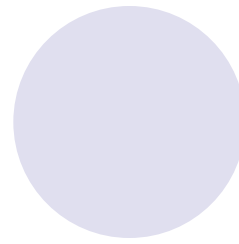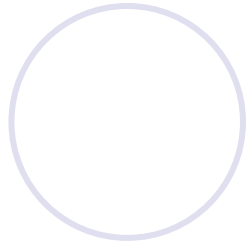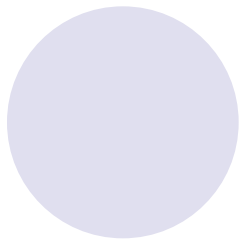
Daily Schedules
(home)

- Prepare the schedule ahead of time with your child (night before or first thing in the morning)

- Review the schedule with your child

- Have your child make choices when appropriate

- Keep the schedule in view but out of reach

- Be sure to update the schedule with your child should the schedule need to change

- Initially provide reinforcement for smooth transitions

Come home	Go to Starbucks	Go to the pool	Eat dinner
Playdate	Playtime	Take a shower	Put on pajamas
Brush your teeth	Go to the city	Go to the park	Take a bath
Read a story	Bedtime	TV time	Go shopping
Eat breakfast	Go to school	Go out to eat	Go outside
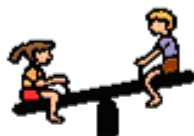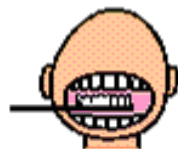
Daily Schedules
(school)

- Prepare the schedule ahead of time with your student (beginning of the day / beginning of the week)

- Review the schedule with your student

- Have the student make choices when appropriate (this includes choice of reinforcer for activity completion)

- Be sure to update the schedule with your student should the schedule need to change

- Initially provide reinforcement for smooth transitions
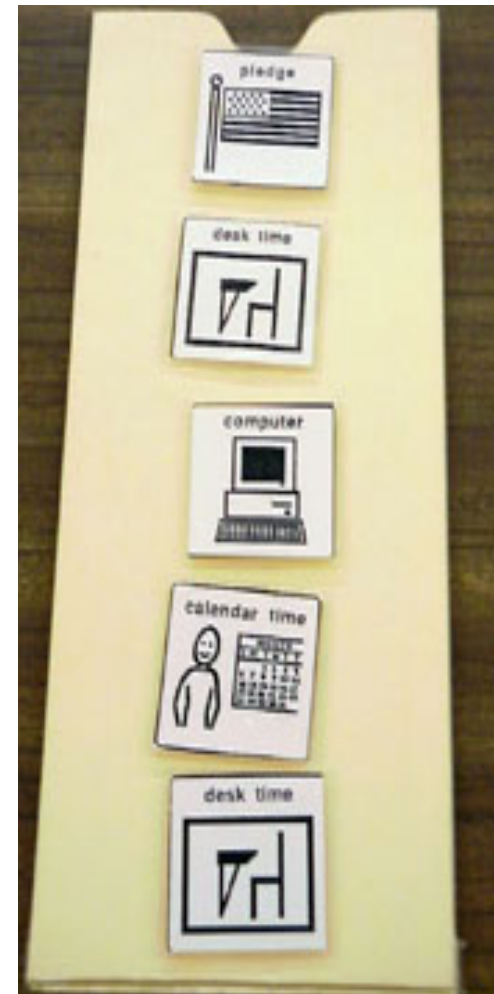
Transitions & Mini Schedules
(home and school)

- You may want to use a mini schedule when out with your child to assist with transitions

Go to Starbucks   Go shopping   Come home

Transitions & Mini Schedules
(home and school)

- For especially challenging transitions at school, an "First/Then" mini schedule can be used

FIRST ⟶ THEN
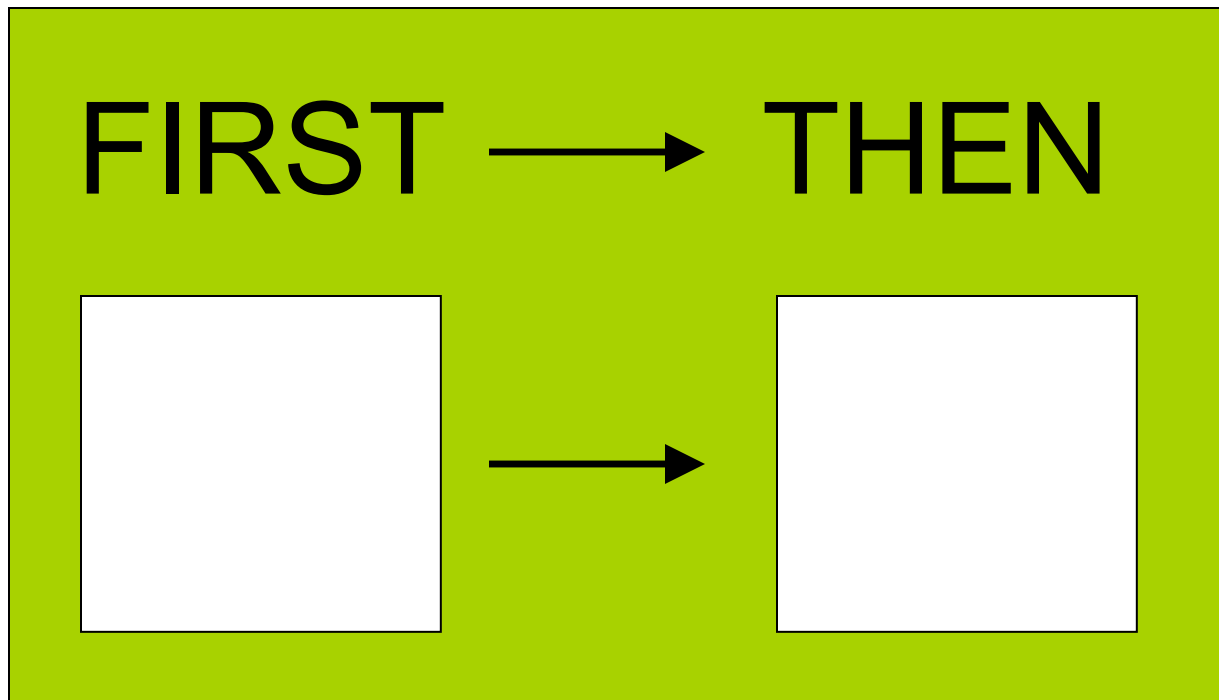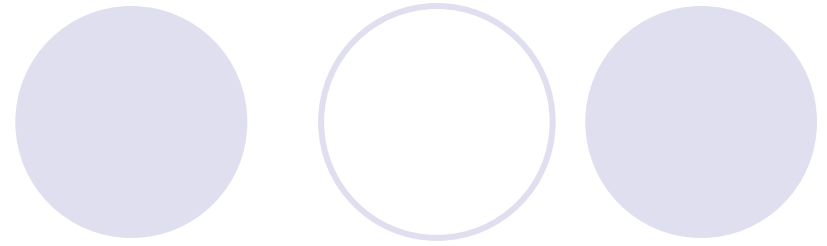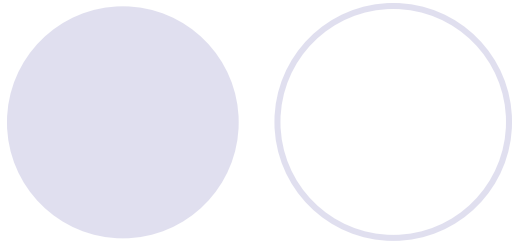
Daily Schedules

- As the child becomes "fluent" with following picture schedules and begins to read, a written schedule may be used

- With text on the pictures of the schedule, the pictures can be faded while the text becomes more prominent

- You can have older children write out their schedule in a notebook, on a dry-erase board, on a piece of paper or in a school agenda

Activity Schedules
~ Independent Play Skills ~
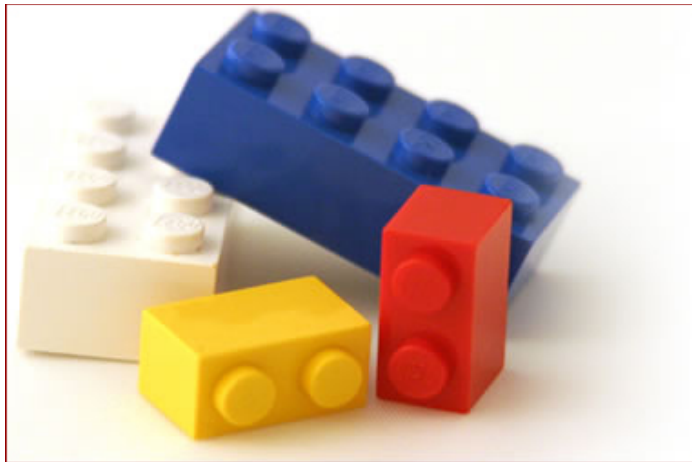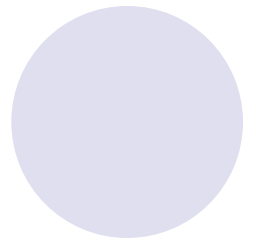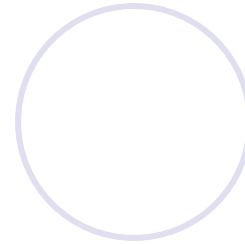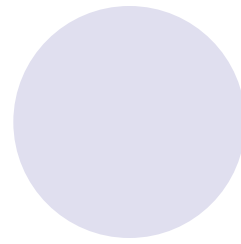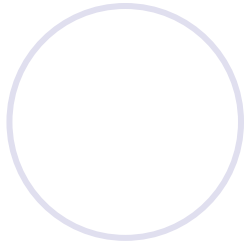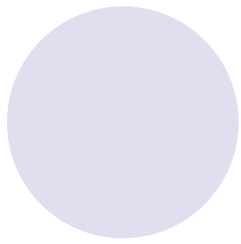
Picture Activity Schedule
~ Independent Play Skills ~

- Increases independent and appropriate use of down time

- Replaces inappropriate behavior (such as stimming) while providing appropriate replacement behavior

- Increases independence overall

- Encourages self-management

- Leads to appropriate workplace behavior later in life (leisure skills)
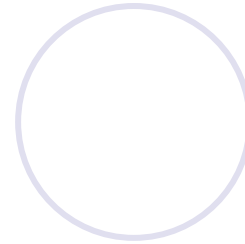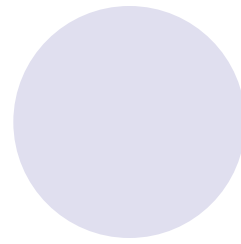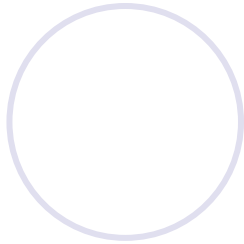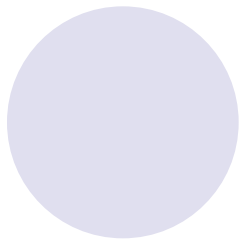
Picture Activity Schedule
~ Independent Play Skills ~

- It is helpful to start with some individual activities that the child can complete independently

- This helps with generalization of new activities

- Initially, activities should have a finite beginning and end

- As the child makes progress with activities with a clear beginning and ending, longer, open-ended activities may be introduced
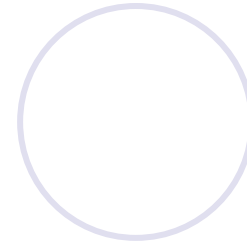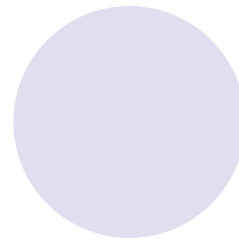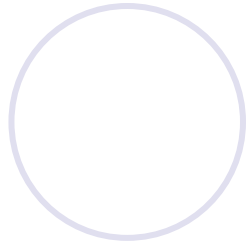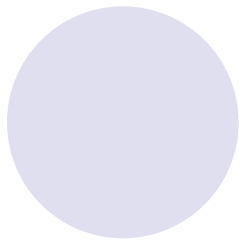
Picture Activity Schedules

- Picture activity schedules come in many shapes and sizes and should be tailored to your child's needs

- Typically picture activity schedules used for independent play are in book form
  - 3-ring binders (small or regular size)
  - Photo albums
  - iPods and iPads may be used as well

- One activity is presented per page

- Depending upon the child's skill level regarding picture-object correspondence, picture-to-picture matching may be used where the child removes the picture and matches it to the picture of the activity on the respective bin or basket

- You may use photographs of actual activities, icons (Boardmaker), clip art, simple line drawings to represent the activity

- The pictures <u>must</u> be clear to your child
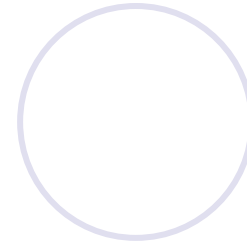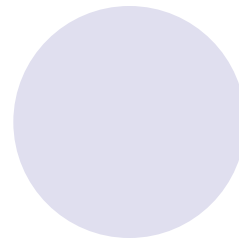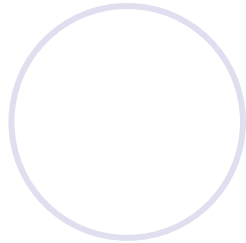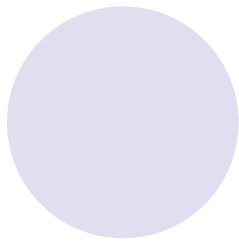
Picture Activity Schedule
~ Procedure ~

- Prior to presenting the picture activity schedule to your child, you will have prepared the schedule ahead of time (you may or may not choose the activities together)

- Give the direction, "It's time to do your (play) schedule"

- Prompt your child to open the schedule and point to the first activity shown

- Guide your child over to the activity (a picture of the activity should be prominently displayed on the outside of the bin or basket) and have him bring it back to the table (the starting point)

- Next your child should take out the materials for the activity and complete the activity independently

- Initially, when providing significant prompting, remain behind your child to prompt ~ try to fade back when possible to promote independence

- Upon completion of the activity, have your child clean up the materials and return the bin back to its original location

- Your child should return directly to the table to the activity schedule and turn the page for either the next activity or a reinforcer
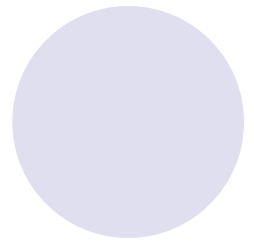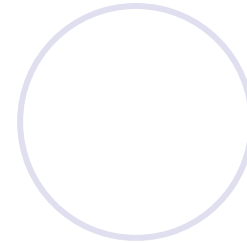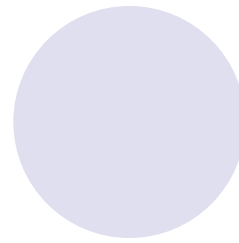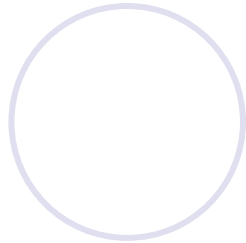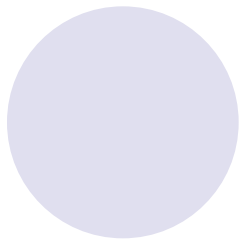
Picture Activity Schedule
~ Procedure ~

- Initially you may want to provide a reinforcer after each activity

- The reinforcer should be in the schedule and should be easily accessible to the child

- Avoid talking to your child during the activity schedule ~ one of the purposes of doing the schedule is to teach independence and to decrease dependence on adults or others

- Start with 2 or 3 activities that are easy and of short duration

- You can gradually increase the time on task needed to complete a particular activity (like puzzles or books)
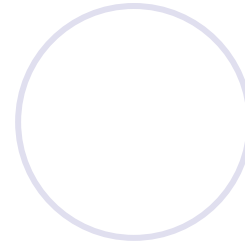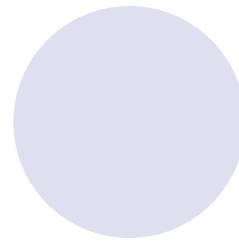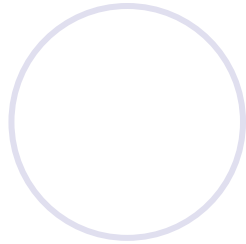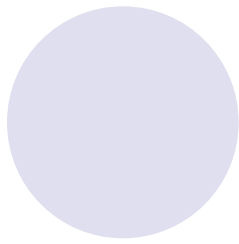
Picture Activity Schedule
~ Timed Activities ~

- Once your child has mastered many activities with a clear beginning and end, you can begin to introduce open-ended activities (like playdoh, blocks, reading, watching TV, playing on the computer, etc.)

- A timer is used for these activities

- Depending upon the age and abilities of your child, the timer can either be preset with a separate timer for each open-ended activity or she can be taught to set the time on the timer

- Some training of pushing the "start" and "stop" button is required and should be done separate from the schedule

- The procedure is the same as with the closed-ended activity schedule except that the child has to perform the additional skill of turning on and off the timer

- By the time the timer is introduced into the schedule, your child should only require reinforcement upon the completion of the entire schedule

Picture Activity Schedules

- Remember you need to initially provide prompting when training an activity schedule but be mindful of the need to fade yourself out of the picture as soon as possible

- You should track all the steps of the schedule and whether or not your child completed them independently ~ this will help you see if your child is making progress toward appropriate, INDEPENDENT play

Data Sheets

Picture Activity Schedule Data Sheet	Activity																				
1. Open book																					
2. Point to picture																					
3. Get activity																					
4. Bring activity to table																					
5. Complete activity																					
6. Put activity away																					
7. Return to table																					
8. Turn page																					
9. Request reinforcer																					
Correct/Total																					
Date																					
Initials																					

Data Sheets

		Activity																				
**Picture Activity Schedule Data Sheet (timer)**

		Activity																				
1.	Open book																						
2.	Point to picture																						
3.	Get activity																						
4.	Bring activity to table																						
5.	Start timer																						
6.	Complete activity																						
7.	Stop timer																						
8.	Put activity away																						
9.	Return to table																						
10.	Turn page																						
11.	Request reinforcer																						
	Correct/Total																						
	Date																						
	Initials																						

Vertical Activity Schedules
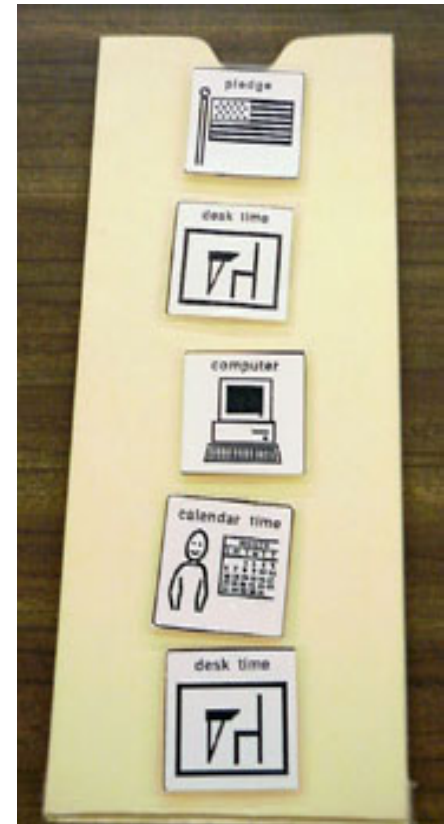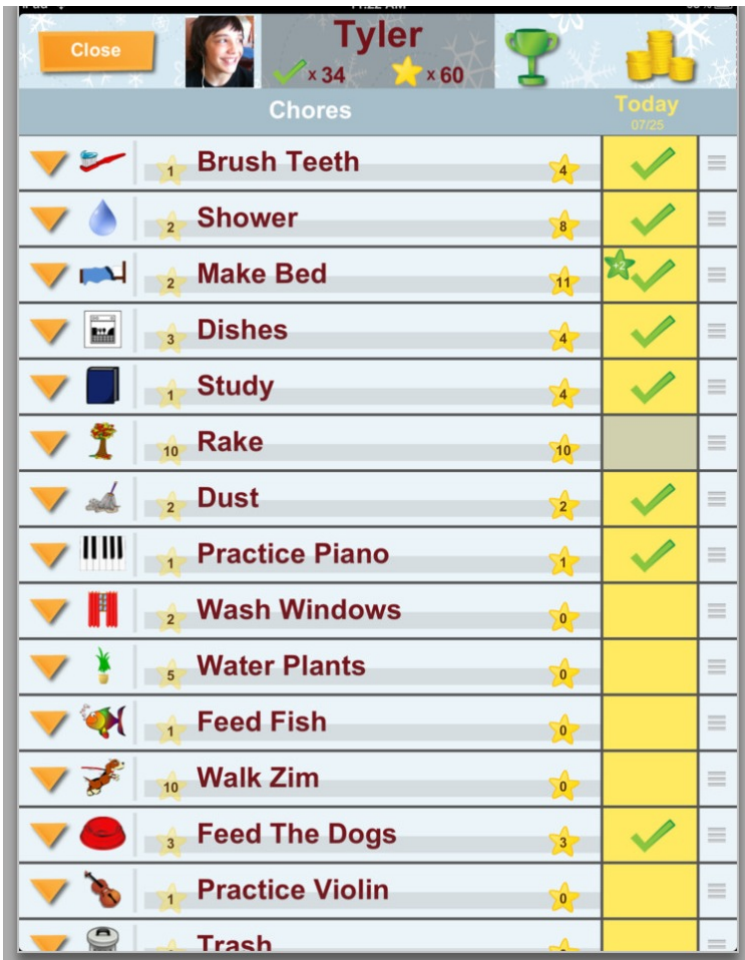
Sample Activity Schedules

put in

Pour 2 cups milk

Sample Activity Schedules ~ Apps

Sample Activity Schedules ~ Apps

Activity List

First-Then
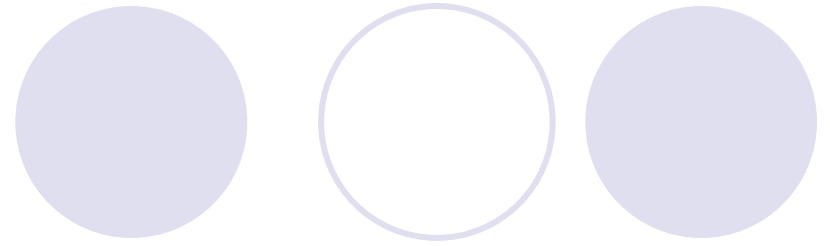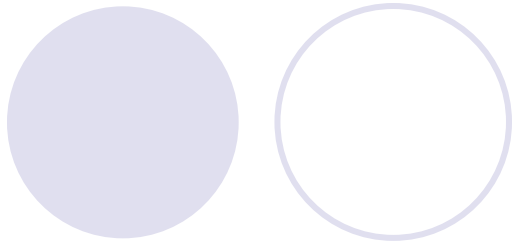
Activity Schedules

- How to create pictures for the schedule

- How to create schedule boards and books

- Apps (Chore Pad, First Then Visual Schedule)

- Software (Boardmaker)

For more information please e-mail:

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Thank you!