

Linda Hodgdon M.Ed., CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist
Consultant for Autism and Related Learning Challenges

P.O. Box 71, Troy, MI 48099-0071 USA
Phone: 248-879-2598 Fax: 248-879-2599
email Linda@lindahodgdon.com
www.LindaHodgdon.com
www.UseVisualStrategies.com
www.AutismFamilyOnline.com

Discovering the Possibilities with Visual Strategies:

Meeting the Communication, Behavior & Social Skill Challenges in
Autism Spectrum Disorders & Related Learning Needs

Communication challenges are a defining feature of Autism Spectrum Disorders and many students with related learning needs. The difficulties with social skills and appropriate behavior that are common in these students are frequently related to the communication difficulties these students experience.

Current thinking suggests that communication impairments transcend all aspects of the life of students with autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and others with moderate to severe communication or behavior challenges. While it is common for educational programming to focus on the development of communication skills for these students, that focus tends to be directed toward developing the student's *expressive* communication skills. Comparatively little attention is directed toward increasing the student's ability to *understand* the communication in his life.

For these children, their struggle with communication is far more complicated than just the development of verbal language. Understanding the communication of others, trying to figure out what is happening or not happening, handling changes and transitions, and interpreting cues and signals in the environment can all be areas of difficulty that result in frustration and behavior that is seen as disruptive.

At the same time, research demonstrates that most of these students display a relative strength in *visual* skills compared to their auditory abilities. Visual strategies capitalize on that strength. Using visual strategies to support communication helps students organize their lives, significantly reduces behavior problems and increases functional communication. This is accomplished in part by developing a system of visual tools and aids to increase comprehension. Schedules, aids to give directions, aids to give information, and aids to establish and communicate rules are some of the tools designed to increase the student's understanding of what's happening around him.

Visual tools and supports are not magic. They won't fix every problem that students have, but they will provide a valuable framework to support their lives. Implementing a system of visual tools and supports significantly reduces various behavior problems and increases effective communication interactions for most students.

The principle of visually supported communication is simple; the impact on the functioning of most students with autism spectrum disorders and others with communication and behavior challenges, however, is profound. While many people use a few visual tools in their homes and education environments, few use this medium of communication support nearly as much as would be beneficial for these students.

This program will demonstrate how and why to expand your use of visual strategies, and explore a number of strategies, including APPS and video, for use at school and home. The use of visual strategies is effective across skill levels, for students from early childhood through adult. Visual strategies work for verbal and nonverbal students. Children with high or low skills benefit from visual supports designed to match their capability. Numerous systems and strategies will be presented that have significantly improved both receptive and expressive communication, social interaction, educational participation and overall behavior.

Participant Objectives

Participants will learn to:

- Identify significant factors in student learning and functioning style that affect communication.
- Informally assess the student's communication strengths and challenges.
- Recognize situations where communication breakdowns can affect the student's understanding, behavior and participation.
- Use the *Guide for Assessing Behavior Situations* to identify causes of behavior problems.
- Develop visual tools to support communication, behavior & social skills
- Identify uses for a range of low tech to high tech tools such as iPads, Apps and video for meeting communication & learning needs.