Umbrella Program Excellence Team

Newsletter

Issue 4

2024

UMBRELLA CHRONICLES

cubby

backpack

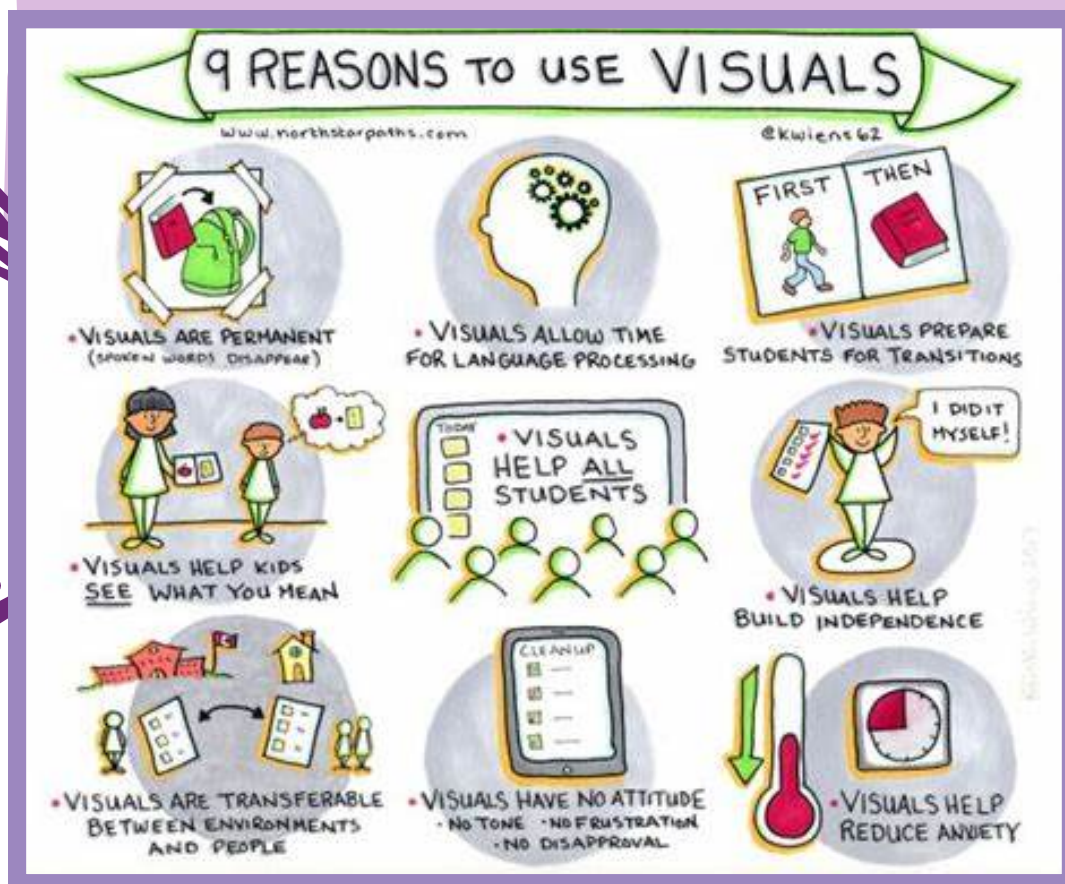take shoes off

THE USE OF VISUALS

We as adults all rely on visual communication every day. We use calendars, day timers, street signs, grocery lists, maps, battery icon and the gas meter in a car and so on. Using visual cues in our environment allows us to plan, organize, and most of all be independent. Visuals are equally important to children because they are just beginning to learn how things work in the world.

9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS

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- VISUALS ARE PERMANENT (SPOKEN WORDS DISAPPEAR)
- VISUALS ALLOW TIME FOR LANGUAGE PROCESSING
- VISUALS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR TRANSITIONS
- VISUALS HELP KIDS SEE WHAT YOU MEAN
- VISUALS HELP ALL STUDENTS
- VISUALS HELP BUILD INDEPENDENCE I DID IT MYSELF!
- VISUALS ARE TRANSFERABLE BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE
- VISUALS HAVE NO ATTITUDE · NO TONE · NO FRUSTRATION · NO DISAPPROVAL
- VISUALS HELP REDUCE ANXIETY

CREATING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy relationships in the classroom involve mutual respect, trust, empathy, and open communication between educators and children. It's about creating an environment where children feel valued, understood, supported in their personal growth.

Strategies for building trust
Getting to know students individually and authentically, showing genuine interest in their lives and interests the children have. Being consistent in interactions. This includes greeting children individually and remembering personal details about them, showing empathy and understanding.

Importance of communication and active listening
Having open conversations with children listening to understand children's perspectives and concerns. Being open to understanding the children's emotions – validating their emotions and saving space for their big feelings allowing them to feel the way they feel. This helps create a sense of belonging and fosters a supportive classroom environment.

Encouraging empathy and understanding
Educators can promote empathy and understanding among children by modelling empathetic behaviour, encouraging perspective taking, and promoting kindness and compassion in interactions. This helps children develop social-emotional skills and cultivate positive relationships with their peers.

Get on their level

When talking to children, think about squatting to meet them at their eye level.

Vs.

We can't expect children to connect with us when we ourselves are dysregulated. It's important that we focus on managing our own feelings, emotions, regulating ourselves, despite what's happening in the room. Research tells us time and time again that a calm adult is the number one predictor in calming a dysregulated child.

ATTENTING TO NEEDS

Circle of Security®
Parent Attending To The Child's Needs
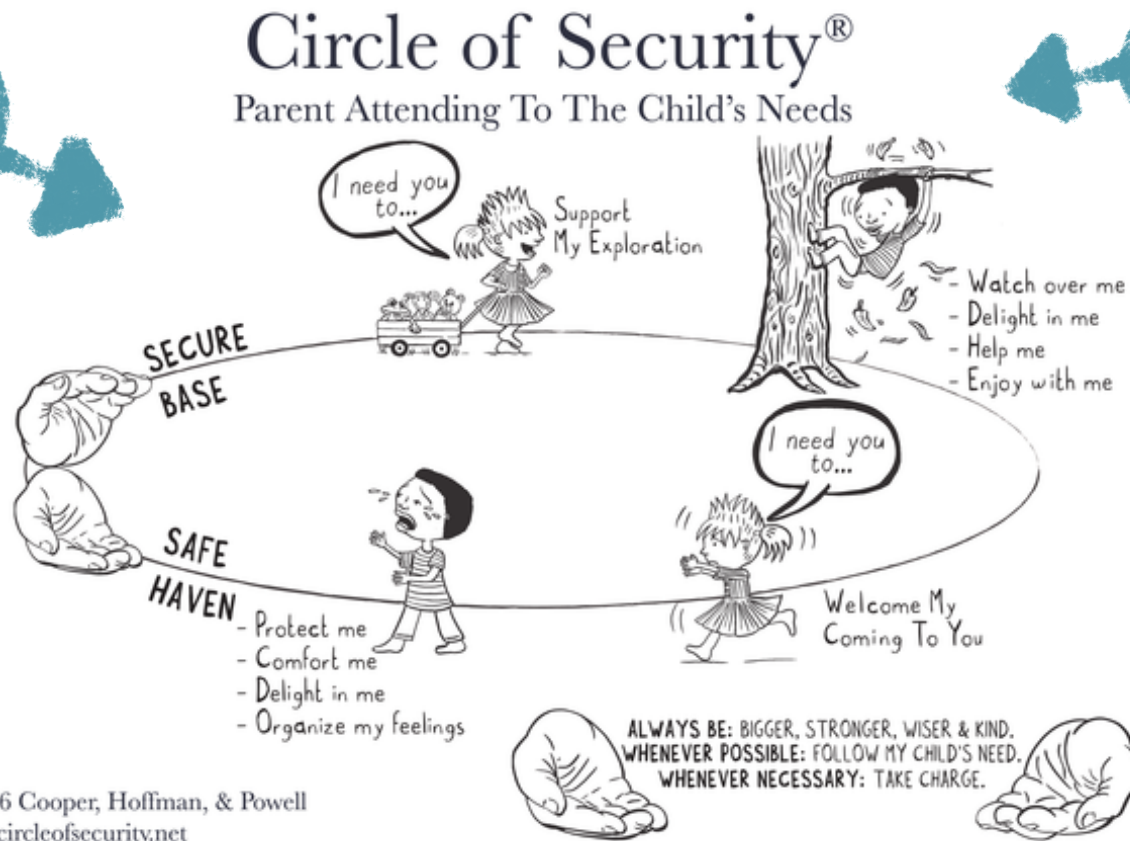
Children have diverse needs, these may include emotional needs (e.g. feeling safe and supported) social needs (e.g. developing friendships and navigating social interactions/skills) academic needs (e.g. receiving appropriate instruction and support). Educators should be proactive in identifying and addressing these needs to ensure a child's over-all well-being and success.

Let's Reflect

In what ways can we role model a state of calm in a childcare setting?

We know that children's ways of calming down are unique to each child. How can we support children in finding calming strategies that work for them?

How can we create environments that promote opportunities for calming? How can we involve children in this process?

ROLE MODELLING

✓ Some characteristics of effective role models may include traits such as empathy, integrity, respect, fairness.

✓ Interactions with children are crucial in the successes that we will see. Getting on the children's level to have face to face conversations shows that we respect them.

✓ Encouraging positive behaviours through role modelling – children do better at doing what they see than doing as they are told. Children are always watching and learning from us we need to lead by example.

✓ Our behaviour and our interactions can influence a child's behaviour and attitudes. Effective role models treat children with kindness and dignity fostering a culture of inclusivity and acceptance in the classroom.

✓ Educators play a crucial role as role models in demonstrating the use of visuals through consistent and intentional modelling, we show the children how to use visuals to communicate their needs, preferences, and thoughts.

✓ This modelling may involve demonstrating how to navigate a communication book, select symbols, and exchange symbols for desired items or activities.

WHAT ARE VISUAL SUPPORTS?


look   listen   listen
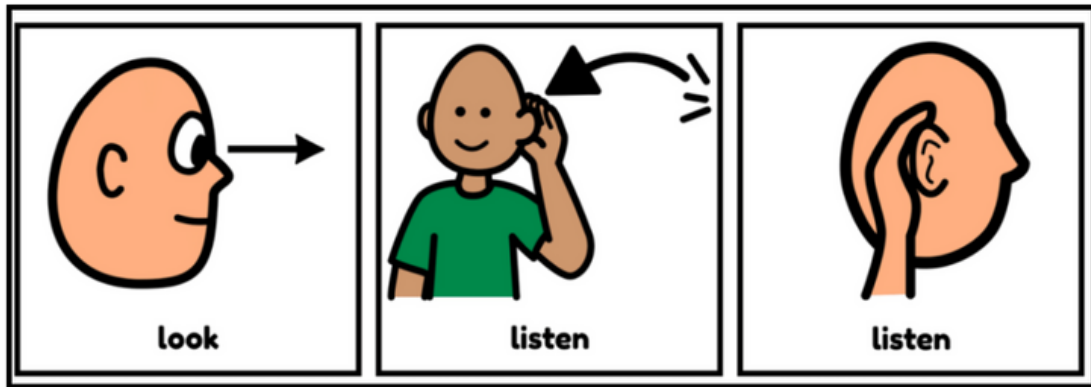
What are visual supports?

- Visual support refers to using a picture or other visual item to communicate with a child.
- Visual supports include photographs, drawings, objects, written words, or lists.

Why are visual supports important?

- Children may not understand social cues as they interact with others daily.
- Visual supports teach social skills and empower children to use them independently in social situations, fostering their social development.
- Children often find it challenging to understand and follow spoken instructions.
- Children may not be able to express what they want or need well. Visuals can help educators communicate expectations.
- By facilitating communication and understanding, visual supports can significantly reduce challenging behaviours often stem from communication difficulties, promoting a more positive learning environment. Some children are anxious or act out when their routines change or they are in unfamiliar situations. Visuals can help them understand what to expect and what will happen next and reduce anxiety.
- Visuals can help them pay attention to important details and help them cope with change.

Get dressed   Underwear   Pants   Shirt   Socks   Shoes
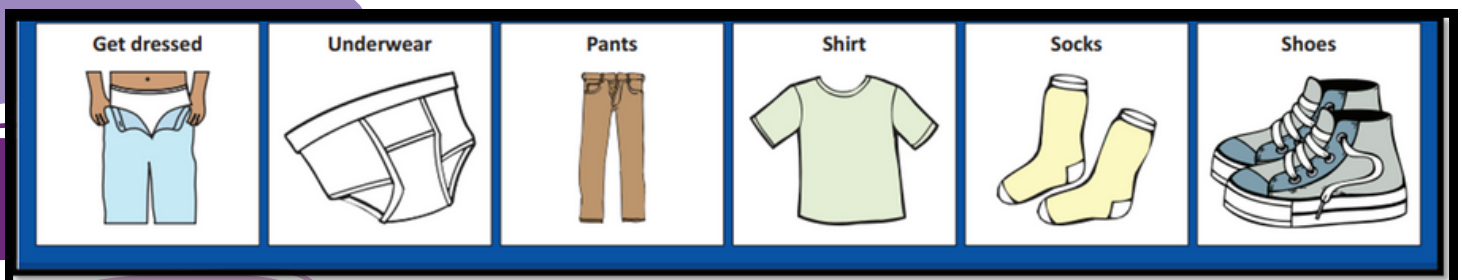
WHAT IS THE EDUCATOR'S ROLE?

Why do visual supports make it easier for children to understand and communicate?

clean up

play

new activity

Words "disappear" right after we say them; visuals hold time and space.

Visuals direct attention to them and hold attention.

Visuals allow more time to process the information.

Visuals assist in remembering.

home

Using the exact words every time a visual is shown teaches the child those words.

WHERE TO PUT A SCHEDULE

- Mount in a visible place where the schedule can be referred to easily (e.g., near the main area of the classroom).
- Keep it accessible for children to refer to on their own.
- Having a visual schedule of the day in the classroom supports self-regulation by helping children to learn and understand what is happening in their day.
- You can help the children learn how to use this tool by pointing to the pictures as you move through different parts of the day.
- Depending on which schedule you choose, you can use peg markers to show where you are or remove the pictures.

HOW TO USE A SCHEDULE

- Choose a specific time(s) of the day when you can go over the pictures on the schedule with your child and name the images in order.
- Remove each picture once the activity is completed (e.g., snack time is finished).
- Show the picture of the upcoming routine (e.g., tidy up, then go outside).
- Show changes in the routine by changing the pictures and describing the change (e.g., no childcare, today stay home).

Raw Lewis - Preschool Room

TIPS

- Make your visuals portable
- Make it durable (laminate)
- Be consistent
- Children can participate in setting up the board with pictures.
- Actual photos of the children can help connect the experience with the daily schedule.
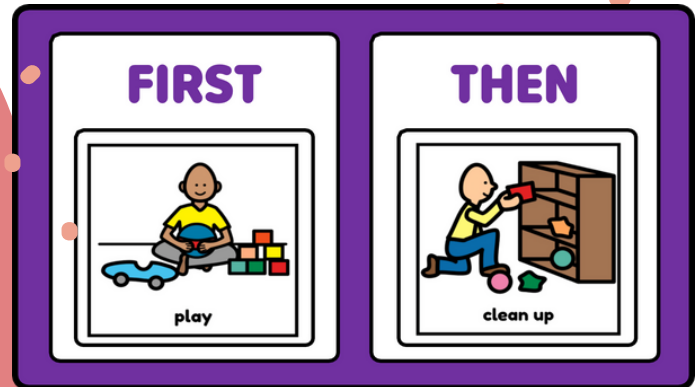
FIRST-THEN BOARD

What is it?
- A First-Then Board is a visual display of something a child prefers that will happen after completing a less preferred task.

When is it helpful?
- A First-Then Board helps teach children to follow directions and learn new skills.
- A First-Then Board motivates them to do activities they do not like and clarifies when they can do what they like.
- A First-Then Board lays the language foundation needed to complete multi-step directions.

How to Use First/Then Board

- The "first" picture is always an activity you want the child to engage in, such as a transition or skill-building activity.
- The "then" picture reinforces the "first" activity by being an activity or object the child enjoys.
- Show the first/then board to the child and name the activities while pointing to the pictures.
- Assist the child in carrying out the sequence.
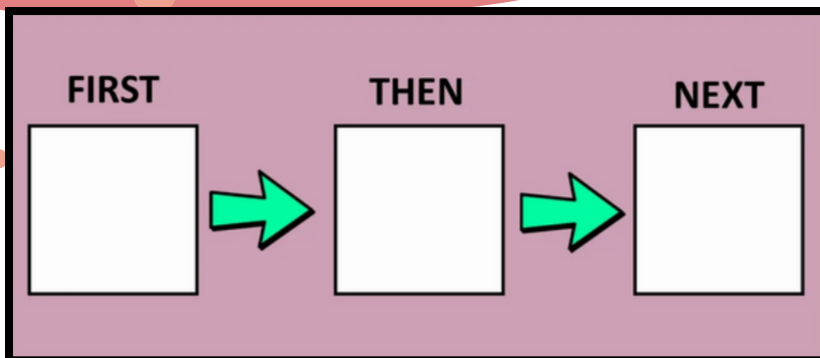
How do I teach it and use it?
- Decide what task you want your child to complete first (what goes in the "first" box) and the preferred item or activity (what goes in the "then" box) that the child can have immediately after the "first" task is done.
- Use visuals on the board (e.g., photos, drawings, written words) to represent your chosen activity. This helps the child understand the sequence of tasks and the reward they'll receive. Try to use the least amount of words possible. - For example, before beginning the "first" task, say, "First, put on shoes, then swing." Refer to the board while your child is doing the task if needed. For example, say, "One more shoe, then swing" when your child is almost done. When completing the "first" task, refer back to the board. For example, say, "All done putting on shoes, now swing!" and immediately provide the preferred, reinforcing item or activity.
-

BENEFITS OF USING A
FIRST-THEN BOARD FOR CHILDREN:

Visual Cue:
A First-Then board provides a clear, concrete visual representation of their expectations, reducing confusion and anxiety.

Sequential Understanding:
It helps children understand the sequence of tasks or activities they must complete. By seeing what comes first ("First") and what comes next ("Then"), they can grasp the order of events more easily.

Predictability:
Predictability can comfort children; knowing what to expect reduces anxiety and promotes smoother transitions between activities or tasks.

Motivation:
The "First-Then" structure can be used to pair a less preferred task (the "First") with a more preferred task (the "Then"). This is a motivational tool, as completing the less preferred task is directly linked to accessing the preferred activity.

Encourages Independence:
Children can develop a sense of independence and autonomy in completing tasks. They may require less prompting or assistance as they become familiar with the routine.

Reduces Challenging Behaviours:
Clear communication and understanding of expectations can reduce frustration and challenging behaviours that may arise from confusion or uncertainty about what is expected of them.

Customizable:
First-Then boards are highly customizable to suit each child's individual needs and preferences. Depending on the child's level of understanding and communication skills, they can be tailored with pictures, symbols, or words.

Teaching Tool:
In addition to using it as a support tool, a First-Then board can also serve as a teaching tool to introduce concepts of sequencing, time management, and task completion.

CURRICULUM CRUMB

VISUAL SUPPORTS IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

CHOICE BOARDS

A choice board is a visual tool that allows a child to select between two or more choices. Depending on the child's language and cognitive ability, pictures, symbols, text, or objects can be used. A choice board can encourage communication by giving the child a means to request a certain activity.

Choice Boards
- Provide information about what options are available
- May be used to broaden your child's play interests
- Prompt your child to make a request or choice
- Clarify spoken language

How to Use Activity Choice Boards:
- If using the choice board to expand upon a child's play interests, place some pictures of activities that they would not usually choose.
- If you are trying to encourage a child to make a choice independently, place pictures of activities or toys that they already like and a picture of a non-preferred activity — to ensure that they are making a choice.
- Start by placing two pictures of possible activities the child may choose from on a board and gradually add more photos.
- The child may indicate their choice by vocalizing, verbalizing, or gesturing.
- To reinforce having made a choice, give the child the indicated choice (e.g., activity, object, food) immediately.

Individual –
- The choices may be presented to broaden the child's play and, therefore, consist of some activities not usually chosen - or to encourage the child to indicate a selection.
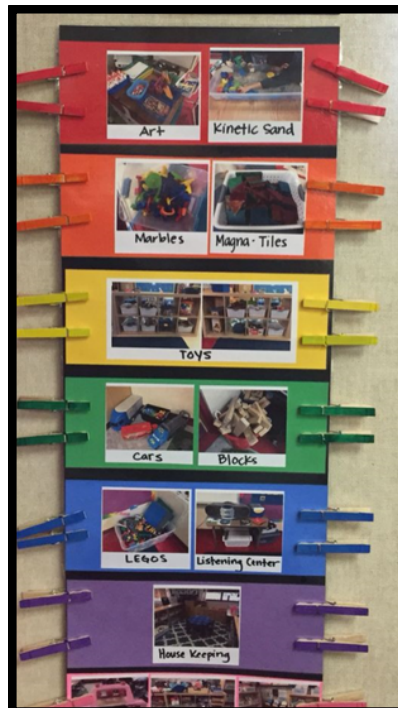
Classwide

- Usually, it consists of a board with activity pockets where each child places his name card in the pocket of the activity in which he would like to engage.
- Each child may have a name clip where the activity card is placed.
- A child can move their name card as they change activities throughout the day.

Transitional Items:

- Transitional items are comfort objects or tools that help children navigate changes or transitions throughout the day.
- These items can include stuffed animals, blankets, small toys, or other objects that hold personal significance to the child.
- Transitional items provide children with a sense of security and familiarity during times of change or uncertainty, such as transitioning from home to school, moving between different activities, or separation anxiety.
- While transitional items can vary from child to child, they serve the common purpose of providing emotional support and promoting a sense of stability during transitions.

Busy Bins

Busy bins are typically accessible to children during designated transition times or when they complete tasks early, providing them with productive and stimulating activities to occupy their time.

- Busy bins are containers filled with various activities or materials children can engage with independently or in small groups.

- The contents of busy bins can vary based on the age and interests of the children, as well as the activity's goals.

> Often the hardest thing about holding space is that it can feel like you're doing nothing.

HOLDING SPACE

WHAT IS IT?

- "Holding space" is often used to create a supportive environment for students to express themselves, explore their thoughts and feelings, and engage in learning without fear of judgment or criticism.

- When educators "hold space" for children, they provide emotional support, encouragement, and validation, allowing students to feel safe, seen, and heard.

WHAT CAN EDUCATORS DO?

- **Active Listening**: Educators attentively listen to students without interruption or judgment, allowing them to express themselves and their thoughts fully.

- **Empathy and Understanding:** Educators demonstrate compassion and understanding toward students' experiences, emotions, and perspectives, creating a compassionate and supportive atmosphere.

- **Non-judgmental Support:** Educators offer support without judgment, allowing students to explore ideas, make mistakes, and learn from them without fear of criticism.

- **Creating Safe Spaces:** Educators establish physically and emotionally safe environments where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and taking academic and social risks.

- **Building Trusting Relationships:** Educators build trusting relationships with students based on mutual respect, understanding, and open communication.

CALMING CORNER

A calming space is where children can practice self-calming when feeling overwhelmed, overstimulated, upset, or even in a spot to relax. Choose an area in the classroom away from the busiest play areas and in supervision.

- Helping children identify their feelings, choose ways to manage their emotions, and calm down in a soft, quiet space teaches children self-regulation.
- Educators can hang pictures on the wall showing emotions such as sad, mad, happy, or scared (preferably the children in your program). Showing these different emotions can be used when you talk to the child.

Role-Model

- After setting up a calming space, like anything else, we need to model how to use it for children.
- After you create the space, could you share it with your group?
- Make sure they understand the goal behind the space.
- The goal is for children to use the calming space until they feel they can rejoin the group.
- Set up rules; children can decide what can go in the area and how to use the materials purposefully.
- Introduce the calming space during small or large groups, not when they become upset or overstimulated.
- Invite children to use the calming space when they feel upset and stay close by to offer the child support and comfort.
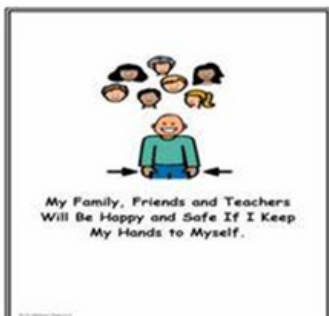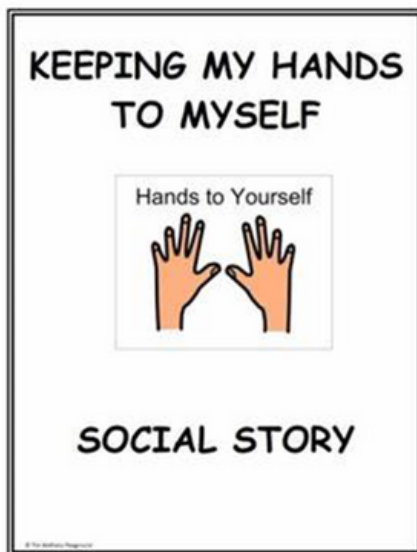
SOCIAL STORY

WHAT IS A SOCIAL STORY

- Social stories are a great way to teach children skills and outline special events and social situations.

HOW ARE SOCIAL STORIES HELPFUL

- With social stories, children can follow a visual scenario they have or will experience and see their options to respond to it with their actions and emotions.
- They promote the understanding of social scenarios and effective communication.
- This builds confidence and reduces anxiety, helping them feel more prepared for their next social interaction.

Benefits of Social Stories

Enhanced Understanding:

- Social stories help individuals understand social situations, expectations, and appropriate behaviours in various contexts. They break down complex social situations into smaller, more manageable parts, making them easier to comprehend.

Improved Social Skills:

- By providing clear explanations and examples of social cues, social stories can improve social skills such as communication, interaction, and social awareness. They help individuals learn appropriate responses to different social situations.

Reduced Anxiety:

- Social stories can reduce anxiety by preparing individuals for upcoming events or changes in routine. By providing predictability and structure, social stories can also help individuals feel more comfortable and confident in unfamiliar or challenging situations.

Personalization:

- Social stories can be tailored to the specific needs and preferences of the individual, making them highly customizable. Personalized stories are more engaging and relevant, effectively promoting desired behaviours.

Positive Reinforcement:

- Social stories often include positive outcomes or consequences associated with appropriate behaviour, reinforcing the importance of following social norms and expectations.

Visual Support:

- Many social stories incorporate visuals such as pictures, drawings, or icons, which can enhance understanding, particularly for visual learners who have difficulty with abstract concepts.

Accessible:

- Social stories can be easily created and shared using various formats, including printed materials, digital resources, and interactive applications, making them accessible to multiple individuals and settings.

PROGRAM EXCELLANCE TEAM

EDIB Committee Jen Allen

The EDIB Committee continues to work through the organizational assessment tool. We are now finished Section 1 of the tool and will be working on the remaining sections. The committee has offered insight into our 2024 Systems Priorities Submission as well.

Ministry and Licensing - Ashley Codispodi

✓ Shout out to the Michaelle Jean team, after the license renewal, their non-compliance score dropped from 12 to 4! Way to go!

✓ Shannen Koostachin was licensed recently with 0 non-compliances! The Program Advisor Wanda, observed and noted the entrance of the childcare centre was representative of the cultures of the families, the staff, and the children. It is so great to see the dedication to Belonging and Community within at the Shannen K location!

✓ Brenda from Templemead spent an afternoon with the Program Advisor Wanda, for the license renewal inspection. There was lots of great discussions with the educators, Sana shared that she had made slime with the children and they would be continuing to explore those materials in the afternoon. Wanda was excited to see familiar faces, including some of our long standing supply. The visit ended with 0 non-compliances, way to go Team Templemead. Thank you to Charlene for helping the Program Advisor find the necessary documents, when she first arrived!

PROGRAM EXCELLANCE TEAM

Communities of Practice - Rebecca MacIsaac and Jenny Redmond

Interested staff can register through the zoom link that will be sent out as part of our training invite.

**Community Of Practice:
Tool for Life(Early Years)
Tuesday, May 7th, 2024
6:30-8:00 pm**

We look forward to connecting with you!