Visual Schedules & Priming Strategies: Integrating Behavioral Strategies in Transition Support for Persons with ASD at Misericordia Home

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MISERICORDIA HEART OF MERCY

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PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS PROGRAM

The Personal Effectiveness Program (PEP) is a developmental training program in Misericordia that was developed for those who aren't able to properly adapt to the demands of a typical occupational or vocational setting. The program and its environment are designed to appropriately cater to the behavioral needs of residents, while also promoting improvement in adaptive behaviors that are necessary for efficient participation in residents' various training programs. The instructors and interns in this program help in enhancing various skills in residents (e.g. decision making, concentration, help-seeking behaviors, etc.) with the help of interactive and sensory-based technology.

SOCIAL JUSTICE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

> The SJI Program is an experiential learning opportunity for students interested in servicing the Chicago community at multiple sites. The program emphasizes the values of social justice and community development. Interns spend around 250 hours between their internship sites or in class examining how to become more proactive in understanding societal structures and dynamics. In class, we look at topics like intersectionality, effective leadership and allyship as means of addressing the need for social justice across several dimensions of contemporary society.

Table 1 Steps for constructing visual schedules (Banda et al. 2009)

Steps for constructing visual schedules	
1. Identify and define target transition behaviors	Identify difficult transition times or activities. Are there specific situations that are difficult? Are there problems with terminating an ongoing activity? Starting a new activity?
2. Collect baseline data on problem behavior	Collect data on frequency or duration of challenging behaviors prior to initiation of treatment
3. Choose a between-activity or within-activity schedule	Will the visual schedule address transitioning across *different activities* (e.g., daily schedule) or across different *steps within a task or activity* (e.g., task-analyzed steps)?
4. Choose a mode of presentation	Different modes are possible including notebooks, binders, or long cardboard or foam strips with Velcro-ed images. Electronic representations on tablet devices, for example, are another option.
5. Choose a medium	Photographs, line drawings, and computer-generated images have all been employed in different systems.
6. Choose a location for the schedule	Display the schedule in a location that is familiar to and useful to the individual. In some cases portable systems may be utilized.
7. Train the student to use the activity schedule	This typically involves one-on-one instructor time with frequent referencing of the schedule, pairing the schedule and activities, and teacher prompts which are faded as the person becomes familiar with using the schedule.
8. Collect intervention data	This may include adaptive data such as on-task behavior and independently completing tasks and transitioning as well as data on problem behaviors.
9. Add new pictures or words	After initial mastery, extend the schedule to longer periods of time or new tasks.
10. Fade prompts	Prompting should be reduced as familiarity with the system increases and the child demonstrates independent behaviors.
11. Fade the prominence of the schedule	Make efforts to make the schedule less obtrusive and more socially and age appropriate.
12. Promote generalization	Generalization across activities and settings are options.

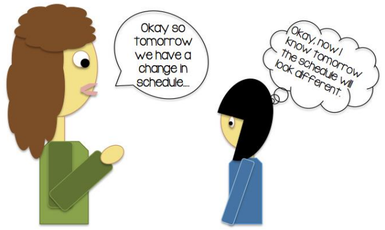
VISUAL SCHEDULES

> These activity schedules are usually used as a support system that feature various images in chronological sequence of the individual's daily routine. This method has been promoted more than other behavioral strategies because it can contribute to the predictability of the individual's day, while also benefiting from the visual-learning skills present in a number of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Sevin et al., 2015).

> In order to maximize the effectivity of this strategy, instructors avoided using verbal cues, so schedule-following would only occur upon being exposed to the stimulus, which was only the schedule. As a result, on-task and on-schedule behaviors rose significantly with the addition of the visual schedule. Additionally, the schedule-following actually generalized, be coming independent of a specific order in event sequence, while still not requiring any additional verbal cues (Sevin et al., 2015).

> Individuals with ASD also responded to the incorporation of visual schedules by having more frequent, self-initiated looking at the schedules, and they showed an increase in both approach behaviors and positive vocalization toward the schedule. In tandem with those results, there was a more than 50% reduction in tantrum behaviors at transition periods after introducing the visual schedules (Sevin et al. 2015).

> In addition, there was incredibly positive evidence supporting the efficacy in incorporating visual schedules across a variety of targets, which include self-regulation in challenging behaviors, play, transition and independence. Overall, there were no difference in the function of the target behavior, the severity of the individual's ASD, communication abilities, or even the method of visual schedules (Sevin et al., 2015).



PRIMING STRATEGIES

> Within priming strategies, a person is exposed to components of an upcoming event or task prior to the actual execution or participation. In certain cases, the demonstrations can occur in a different setting, and in other cases, there may be a pre-activity demonstration in the actual setting in which the activity will occur later on (Sevin et al., 2015).

> Instructors and caretakers can utilize various modalities of presenting a primer, which can benefit from the strong visual learning abilities in certain individuals with ASD. A video priming procedure was developed to demonstrate activities being done in the point of view of the individual with ASD, which was mainly used to support those that exhibited disruptive/problem behaviors while transition in their daily routine. They were exposed to recorded videos prior to going into transition periods and received a reward for watching the video, e.g., toys, praise, etc. (Screibman et al., 2000).

> In the case of using the video priming procedure, there was a significant decrease in tantrum behaviors when including the video method into instruction. There was rapid, positive response to this modality in some cases, and in others, there was a need for a larger volume of exposure to the recorded videos; however, both resulted in positive results overall for all of those being observed (Schreibman et al., 2000).

> Within priming strategies, researchers recommend that priming sessions be completed before the actual event, that there should be a relatively low demands while engaging in the priming session, and that there should be a potential source of reinforcement in the priming session (Zanoli et al., 1996).

REFERENCES

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STRATEGIES & PEP

After being provided with the training to grasp these concepts, I was able to understand how the personal effectiveness program integrated empirical strategies to supplement the developmental training for residents, especially since most residents in PEP have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

> I learned about the importance of understanding the behavior support plan implemented in each resident's profile when it comes to becoming familiar with target behaviors and challenging behaviors, e.g. escape, avoidance.

> I learned how to navigate working with residents on a very extensive spectrum based on individualized approaches set by the behavior analysis team; this required utilizing visual schedules and priming strategies, or even both throughout the day in order to facilitate their development of vocational and occupational skills by utilizing the two empirically effective strategies.

> Lastly, I've learned how challenging it can be to obtain substantial results in positive behaviors as a result of the level of support that the resident is receiving as well as the amount of time they are being conditioned to respond to these behavioral strategies.

REFLECTION

During my time as an intern at PEP in Misericordia, I learned that it is absolutely imperative to withhold qualities of empathy and patience, especially in regard to working with vulnerable communities. While furthering the development those qualities in myself, I grew to appreciate the uniqueness of each resident and how that uniqueness manifested itself because I was provided with perspective from a community I haven't had the opportunity to work with before. I have gotten to understand that Misericordia as a whole values every single resident and employee, making my time at this internship immensely enjoyable and memorable. I know that I have acquired the necessary foundational skills to serve the differently abled community in the future when I eventually become a doctor, and this was all made possible by the Social Justice Internship Program.

Interested in learning more about my work as a Social Justice Intern?
Contact: amedina9@luc.edu

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