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## If A Picture Paints 1000 Words, Why Settle for Just One? Using visual strategies to enhance independence, social skills, household rules, and provide access to the general education curriculum.

By: Joan E. Guthrie Medlen

You come home from work after a long day. You're tired. You don't have a lot of patience left. There's dinner to make, clothes to wash, and homework to do. It is soccer night? Quickly, you peek at the calendar. No soccer tonight. Your son with Down syndrome comes into the kitchen to greet you.

"Hi Mom!"

"Hi Dan. How was school?"

"Good. Do we see Joe tonight?" (Joe is soccer coach)

"No, not tonight. I have to make dinner. I'll call you when it's ready. OK?"

"Ok Mom!" He leaves.

\* Five minutes later, Dan is back.

"Where are my shorts?! We have to get ready!"

"It's not soccer night. Tomorrow is soccer."

\* Five minutes later, Dan is back.

"Where are my shoes! I need my soccer shoes!"

"It's not soccer night. Tomorrow is soccer."

(repeat until dinner is ready)

Tired yet? Visual strategies are perfect for this type of situation. By creating an easy-to-use reminder system, Dan could learn to consult the activity calendar to find out if today is soccer day. Over time, he would consult the calendar rather than you to remind himself if he needed to get ready for soccer.

Even if your child reads quickly, written words organized in a visual manner are considered visual strategies. In this workshop different ideas for visual strategies focused on home and designed for home (rather than turning home into school) will be shared. Visual strategies can make life easier

for everyone and encourage independence and literacy at the same time.

1. Visual Strategies:
  - a. Definition:
  - b. Why Use Visual Strategies
2. What can visual strategies be used for?
  - a. Communication (vocabulary, labeling, etc)
  - b. Encourage literacy at home and in the community
  - c. Teach independence using visual cues
  - d. Teaching and reminding household rules.
  - e. Social skills
  - f. Self-monitoring
  - g. Organization
  - h. Planning for upcoming events
  - i. Transitions
  - j. Motivation (reward chart)
  - k. Gives context to a situation
  - l. Schedules
  - m. Setting up the house for your child's success
  - n. Share and receive information
3. Examples
  - a. Making Choices
  - b. Calendars, day planners
  - c. Menu planners
  - d. People locators
  - e. Household rules
  - f. Shopping
  - g. Social skills & "life skills"
  - h. Transition tools
  - i. Solving tough behavior
  - j. Schedules
  - k. Activity Schedules
  - l. Task organizer
  - m. "sitter" helper (a home portfolio)
  - n. Home-to-school communication
  - o. Homework helpers

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About the Author: The Enoch-Gelbard Foundation

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should consider psychological or emotional stressors that may be impacting behavior, such as depression, anxiety, changes at home, a sibling moving away, or parents going through a divorce.

Once you've ruled out medical or psychological issues, you can work with a professional to help develop a behavior treatment plan. This involves looking at what we call the ABC's of behavior: the antecedent - what precedes the behavior - the behavior itself, and the consequences of the behavior. It is important to look at both positive and negative consequences. It is always preferable to use positive consequences to reward appropriate behavior. That is something we often forget to do. When our child is being good, we think, "Now's the time to wash the dishes or fold the laundry!" We really should be reinforcing the behavior, saying things like "I really like what you're doing now." Most of us are not used to doing this, and we have a tendency to reward negative behavior by giving children attention when they're doing something we don't like.

A lot of acting out behavior is actually done to get attention, so when we use positive consequences to reinforce good behavior we can decrease negative behavior. Sometimes, however, there must be negative consequences, like "time outs" or, in the case of an older child, taking away privileges, for inappropriate behavior. It's important to remember that, particularly for younger kids, the consequence has to be delivered when the behavior happens. For example, it is often difficult for a child to make the connection between something they did wrong at school and the consequence they get for it at home.

**Q. What advice would you give to parents who feel overwhelmed because of behavioral issues?**

I would advise parents to remember that they cannot work on all the challenging behaviors at the same time. For example, we may have a child who comes in to the clinic whose parents say: he is having temper tantrums, we cannot get him to bed at night, he throws food, and so on. There may be five or six different concerns, but you have to target a specific behavior on which to focus your energy. As parents develop skills around managing that particular behavior, they will find that those skills carry over to management of the other behaviors.

It is important to remember that the challenging behaviors we see in children with Down syndrome are behaviors that are seen in all children. They may occur at a later chronological age and last a bit longer. If you need extra help, there are people you can turn to, including your pediatrician, school psychologist, therapists and Down syndrome clinic staff.

About the Author: Dr. Bonnie Patterson is director of the Jane and Richard Thomas Center for Down Syndrome in the Division of Developmental Disabilities at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Her specialties include Down syndrome, learning disabilities and autism, with a focus on behavioral issues. Dr. Patterson is a member of the NDSS Clinical Advisory Board and co-chair of the Down Syndrome Medical Interest Group

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