



Supporting Organizational Skills

Between the executive function deficits (short term memory, attention, sequencing, etc.) and the language and social challenges of autism, keeping pace with the world around becomes extremely challenging. If a student is having a hard time processing sensory information, he may be distracted from organizing his thoughts and work.

Strict routines provide some order to the chaos a student with autism experiences. Predictability will reduce his anxiety. Unexpected changes to routines can cause significant distress and behaviors.

Organizers and schedules can help reduce anxiety and increase. Just as a busy teacher or business person might use a planner or smart phone to organize important dates and times, and a To DO list to stay on track, a visual schedule helps establish routines and keep the student focused, productive and informed of what is coming next.

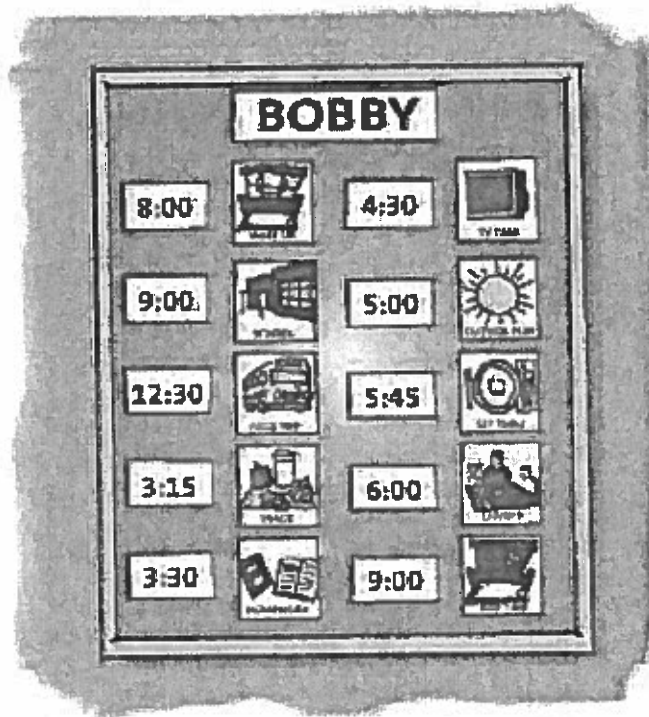
- Provide a schedule of daily activities. Depending on the needs of the student, this can be photos, symbols or written information. Provide information on what is happening, in what order, and any changes to the regular routine (for example, a substitute teacher, assembly, field trip, or fire drill).

Sample Daily Schedule (Middle School Student)				
Starting Bell	Subject	Where	Materials I Need	Ending Bell
8:10	Homeroom	Room 117		8:15
8:15	SRA Reading	Room 117	Purple SRA Books	8:59
9:04	English	Room 117	Spelling Book yellow folder	9:48
9:53	Science	Room 117		10:37
10:37	Nutrition	Outside	Snack	10:52
10:57	Social Science	Room 117	11:41	
11:46	Math	Room 117	Purple Folder	12:30
12:30	Lunch	Outside	Lunch OR Wallet	1:05
1:10	Reading	Library	Book	1:25
1:25	PE	Locker Room/Outside		2:10
2:15	Elective			3:00





A sample visual schedule for a kindergarten student using Velcro pictures:



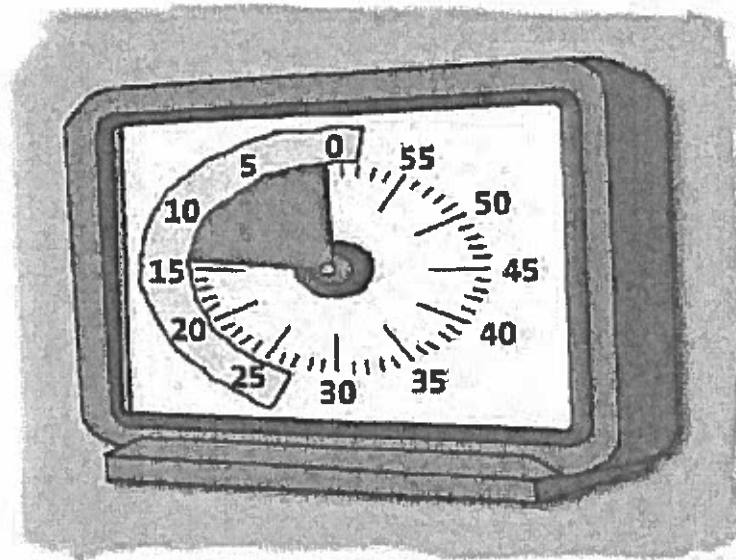
- Some students need more detail, such as the sequences of activities within a period.
For example:
Period 2 Reading:
 1. reading group, pages 22-25
 2. comprehension questions
 3. silent reading at my desk
- The simplest visual schedule format—readily available in any situation with paper and writing instrument:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- Create 'to do' lists and checklists for completing tasks or assignments.
- Streamline and teach to mastery, creating supports that can be generalized across activities (for example, Get worksheet. Take out a pencil. Write name on paper. Write date. Read directions)
- A student will need to be taught to reference his schedule, checking off activities as they are completed, and eventually using it to build independence for managing time and activities.





Organizing materials, time and activities

- Use binder organizers, color-coded folders by subject or teacher, etc.
- Use labeled desk organizers (divide the desk into areas, work to complete, text books, pencils/pens etc.) and classroom supports (for example, label the 'homework in' bin).
- Manage time and deadlines using tools like time organizers, visual calendars, tablets (such as iPads), smart phones, computers, countdown timers (www.Timetimer.com) or watches with alarms. Break long assignments into chunks and assign time frames for completing each chunk.



The TimeTimer™ shows how much time remains in an activity

- Schedule a regular (weekly?) time to clean and organize the workspace and update planners.
- Create organization for group activities and provide help or strategies for identifying the student's role within the group and his responsibilities.
- Create visual schedules for specific tasks and routines.
- Use schedules to prepare for transitions and teach flexibility and problem solving.
- Warn the student of changes in routine or upcoming transitions (e.g. 'in five minutes we need to clean up the paints and go to reading groups').
- Use social narratives to prepare for novel events - field trips, fire drills, assemblies etc.
- Organize problem solving, teaching step-by-step strategies to organize thoughts for problem solving, sequencing, etc.
- Work on flexibility and handling changes in very small steps, using visual supports and rewards, so that the student learns to control his anxiety because of these previous successes.



