

# How to Create a Visual Schedule for Healthcare Appointments

## A Toolkit for Parents, Care Partners, and Supporters

Visual schedules are a powerful tool to prepare Autistic individuals—of any age—for new or potentially stressful experiences, such as healthcare visits. By breaking down the process into clear steps using pictures, words, or both, visual aids can reduce anxiety, increase predictability, and support communication. This toolkit guides you through creating a tailored visual schedule in collaboration with the Autistic person you support.

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### Why Use a Visual Schedule?

- **Predictability:** Makes unfamiliar experiences more structured and understandable.
- **Anxiety Reduction:** Helps manage stress and supports emotional regulation.
- **Communication aid:** Ideal for non-speaking individuals or those who process visual information more effectively.
- **Empowerment:** Encourages autonomy and active participation in the process.



### What You'll Need

- **Materials:** Paper or poster board, or a digital device (like a phone or tablet).
- **Visuals:** Printed or drawn images (real photos, clipart) or digital icons.
- **Tools:** Tape, Velcro, magnets, or other materials for interactive schedules.
- **Labels:** Words or short labels under pictures.
- **(Optional)** A “First-Then” Board for people who do better with just two steps at a time.
- **Free templates and resources:**
  - [Boardmaker](#)
  - [Do2Learn](#)

# Step-by-Step Guide

## 1. Collaborate with the Autistic Person

**Involve them in the process to ensure the schedule meets their needs. Ask:**

- “Would you like to use pictures, words, or both?”
- “Do you want to know each step, or just a few at a time?”
- “What helps you feel calm at the doctor’s office?”

## 2. Break Down the Visit into Steps

**Customize based on age, preferences, and medical needs. Example steps:**

- Preparing (ex. getting dressed or packing a comfort item)
- Traveling to the office or clinic
- Checking in and waiting
- Meeting the doctor and completing medical tasks (ex., exam, vaccine).
- Post-visit reward or calming activity
- Head home and decompressing

## 3. Select or Create Visuals

**Choose images that resonate with the individual:**

- Real photos of the clinic/staff (call ahead to request these if needed).
- Icons or drawings for abstract concepts (ex., "waiting").
- Labels to reinforce understanding.

## 4. Organize the Schedule

**Arrange steps in order using:**

- Tape images onto a strip of paper
- Use a board with removable visuals (ex. Velcro)
- A digital app or slideshow
- Use a First-Then format if too many steps feel overwhelming

## 5. Review and use the Schedule Before the Visit:

**Walk through the schedule together and address any concerns.**

- During the visit, bring the schedule for reference. Allow the individual to hold it or mark completed steps.

### Tips for Success

- Offer choices: "Would you like to bring headphones or a fidget toy?"
- Use supportive language: Focus on comfort, not "good behavior."
- Include sensory supports: Noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses, or weighted items.
- Plan for downtime: Add calming activities after the visit.

### Additional Resources

- [Autismsociety.org/vei](https://autismsociety.org/vei)
- [Pathfinders for Autism – Visual Supports for Hospital Visits](#) (includes examples!)
- [National Autistic Society – Visual Supports](#)
- [Autism Parenting Magazine – Creating Visual Schedules](#)