

Visual Supports – A Bridge to Independence

Why what is essential for some is brilliant for everyone.

The Myth: "Visuals make students lazy and/or deskilled."

The Reality: Visuals are not a "cheat sheet." They are a **cognitive scaffold**. Just as a carpenter uses a spirit level to ensure a wall is straight, a student uses visuals to ensure their thinking is structured. Research shows that visual supports actually **increase** verbal language because they reduce the anxiety and "brain power" spent on trying to remember what to do next.

Why Use These Tools Universally?

1. The "Sat-Nav" Effect (Now & Next Boards)

Imagine driving to a new city without a map or GPS, relying only on a passenger shouting directions. You'd be stressed, prone to mistakes, and entirely dependent on that person.

- **The Benefit:** A **Now & Next** board is a GPS. It allows the student to see the route ahead. This builds **true independence** because the student looks at the board rather than asking the teacher "What do I do now?" every five minutes.

2. The "Dashboard" for Emotions (Zones of Regulation)

We all have "internal weather." For a young person, identifying a complex emotion like "frustration" is hard.

- **The Benefit:** By using the **Zones of Regulation** as a class, we give everyone a shared vocabulary. It moves a child from "acting out" their feelings to "naming" their feelings. A student who can say "I'm in the Yellow Zone" is a student who is ready to learn self-regulation—a life skill far beyond the classroom.

3. Reducing the "Processing Gap"

Oral language is **transient**—it disappears the second it is spoken. Visual language is **permanent**.

- **The Benefit:** For a student who is tired, distracted, or has a slower processing speed, a visual prompt stays there to be revisited. It levels the playing field so that the "fast" processors and the "deep" processors can both access the same curriculum.
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Common Questions

- **"Will they ever stop using them?"** Yes! Think of them like training wheels on a bike. We don't take the wheels off until the balance is there. For many, the visual eventually becomes an "internalized" map.
- **"Isn't this just SEND teaching?"** No. It is an inclusive **design**. If a building has a ramp, everyone can use it. If a classroom has visuals, every child's cognitive load is lowered, allowing them to focus more energy on complex learning and creativity.