



Teaching Adaptability Strategies and Skills by Creating Flexible Schedules

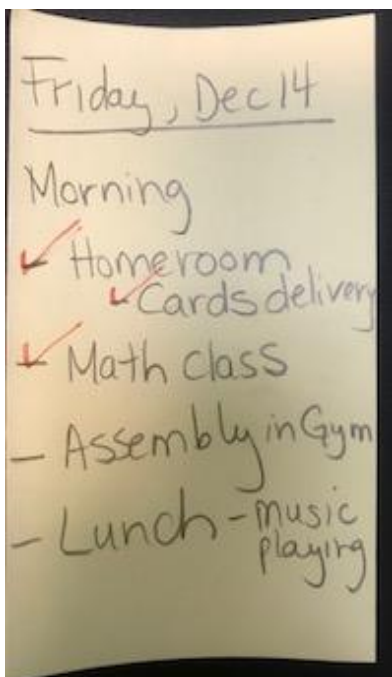
Sheri Gallant, M.Ed, BCBA
Learning Specialist, Autism Learning Partnership

Paul is an active and artistic ten-year-old who loves drawing and participating in Art class. He independently follows his school routine with the use of a visual schedule and often expresses his excitement when art is the next day or coming up later in his routine.

It's the week before the December break and Paul's teacher knows there will be excitement in the air and changes to the school routine including concerts, special guests, and festive music. She plans her lessons and rearranges the class schedule to incorporate learning activities with holiday themes and the interests of her learners. Her first lesson incorporates art, language arts, math, and science outcomes and she plans to have her class work on the project for most of the morning as they listen to music. She is looking forward to Paul's enthusiasm about the morning lesson. As she begins to share the instructions with the class, she notices Paul becoming more and more upset... Why might Paul be upset and what could we do to help him?

As the holiday season approaches, routines at school and home change to make room for event preparation and festivities. During these times we may notice our learners, like Paul, struggle with changes in their schedule. If your learners are having challenges with routine changes, this could be a sign that there is a need to begin teaching the skills and strategies associated with being adaptable. One way to begin, is to create and teach the use of [flexible schedules](#).

A Written Schedule



When your learners understand language, begin by explaining that sometimes the schedule will change and how the change will be communicated. For both learners with language and those with limited understanding of language, demonstrating how a change in schedule will be communicated will be key.

For learners who can read, a written list or agenda for the day's upcoming activities and tasks can be written down on a white board, notepad, or sticky note. The list can be reviewed throughout the day and as activities or tasks are completed, the item can be checked off, crossed off, or erased.

Visual Schedules



For learners who use visual schedules, a picture or icon that represents 'change in schedule' is a simple way to communicate that something out of routine will happen during the day. A 'change in schedule' picture can be placed directly on the existing schedule, on top of the activity that usually happens, during the time slot, or in the order the activities or tasks will occur.

A 'change of schedule' picture or icon such as 'surprise' or 'special activity' can be helpful for unexpected changes in the schedule throughout the year.

This strategy can help Paul to understand and adjust to the changes in his schedule and allow him to enjoy more of the fun activities occurring during the month of December and year-round!



Special activity

