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OBJECT SCHEDULES

Some people with learning challenges have a difficult time understanding what is happening in their daily schedule and when scheduled events are supposed to occur. Anxiety and behavior problems can result when an individual is unable to understand and predict routine events and unusual events.

An object schedule is a simple and inexpensive way to provide information to learners in an easy to understand format. An added feature of the system is that it can become a way for people with communication difficulties to signal their desire to initiate particular activities.

Characteristics of individuals who may benefit:

Includes people who:

- Don't communicate very well
- Have learning disorders
- Don't adapt well to schedule changes
- Have difficulty in times of transitions
- React negatively when a scheduled event does not occur
- React negatively when an unscheduled event occurs
- Have problems reacting calmly to the schedule, even when someone tells the person what to expect or what is going to change

Materials needed:

Shoe or boot boxes

Staples

Tape

Objects that are used at the beginning of activities.

Examples: A swimsuit to use in swimming

A hairbrush to use in grooming

Some cleaner to use to start kitchen clean up

A stapler to use to do a collating task

A calculator to use to do math problems

A washcloth and soap to use in the shower

A "discard" box or basket that can hold items after they are used

Method:

Staple shoe or boot boxes together to make a row. Cover the staples with tape so that no one gets scratched when using the boxes.

Determine the individual's schedule for that day. Place objects in the boxes in the order in which the scheduled activities will occur.

Starting at the left side of the row of boxes, help the person take the first item out of the first box and then complete the activity that the object represents. When the activity is completed, put the object in the "discard" box. Go to the second box and help the individual to remove the next item and use it in the activity. Proceed through all of the boxes.

As each item is finished being used it is placed in another large box or basket to show that it is finished. This system adapts well for individuals who are deaf and blind because the individual can feel the empty boxes to know those tasks are completed, then find the object in the next box and initiate that task.

(If an individual seems confused by seeing all the objects at once, start with just one box. Place the item to be used in that box, assist the individual in using it and then in placing it in the discard or finished box. Later, move to two boxes. Gradually increase the number of boxes and items shown to the individual at one time, depending on the person's tolerance.)

Sometimes learners will spontaneously put items in the schedule boxes to show others that they want to initiate a certain activity. Learners can be taught to do this.

Be very consistent: when you show the individual an object in the current box, always immediately do the activity with which it is associated. Use physical, visual and spatial prompts during activities to decrease verbal prompt dependence and increase independence.

Examples of Variations:

- An object schedule box in the bathroom with grooming articles laid out to be used
- An object schedule in the kitchen with ingredients for a cake displayed in the order in which they will be used
- An object schedule at the office with items to signal the work activities that need to be completed in a particular order
- An object schedule in the bedroom with clothing laid out in the order in which it needs to be put on

Language enrichment:

- Pictures or drawings of the activities can be taped in or on the boxes with the objects to expose the learner to the meaning of the pictures so that perhaps in the future the learner could transition to a picture schedule.
- Clock faces or copies of digital clock readouts can be placed on each box to help the learner make the connection between the time on the clock and the onset of the activity.
- Word cards that describe the activities can be put on or in the box in case the learner can benefit from printed words. (Don't underestimate a learner's ability to benefit from exposure to print!)

EXAMPLE

The morning schedule for Bill is:

Toileting and grooming
Breakfast
Clean the kitchen
Write a letter to his mom on the computer
Go for a walk outside
Make the week's grocery shopping list
Water the plants
Prepare lunch for himself and his roommate
Eat lunch

The objects for these nine activities would be put in the boxes for him, or he could assist with setting up the schedule by placing the objects in the boxes in the correct order.

The objects might be:

- Box 1: his shaving kit with toiletries
- Box 2: a plate and cup to indicate a meal
- Box 3: some cleaning solution and a sponge
- Box 4: the envelope addressed to his mother
- Box 5: the cap he wears when he takes a walk outside
- Box 6: the pad of paper and pencil to use for the grocery list
- Box 7: the watering can
- Box 8: the box of macaroni and cheese to prepare
- Box 9: a plate and cup to signal a meal