

Visual Supports for Infants and Toddlers

Rules and Expectations



Visual supports, such as objects, photos, or drawings, add visual information to a learning environment to help children know what to do and how to interact during routines and activities. Visual supports have many different uses and can support children with a variety of learning characteristics.

This special collection of visual supports was designed with **young children between the ages of 16 to 36 months in mind**. The visuals are simple and concrete to match the developmental needs of young children who are just beginning to develop symbolic thought. Each visual support has a guide with information to help determine a child's need for support and what visual cues will be most useful.

Below find the information needed to create and use **rules and expectations** visuals to help infants and toddlers learn to use and follow common expectations to keep themselves and others safe.

What?

The rules and expectations visual supports includes pictures of six common rules or expectations in early learning and care environments. Each visual has a drawing and a short description written in simple, positive language that very young children can understand. Using visual supports to teach children the expectations helps create consistent and predictable learning environments.

Why?

Visual supports depicting rules and expectations help children learn and remember the rules that support safe and positive behaviors.

You can use the rules and expectations visuals to:

- Teach and remind children of social behaviors and rules they need to follow in the learning environment.
- Give extra support to a child who struggles to follow a rule or engage in positive social interactions.

How?

1. **Make rules and expectations visuals.** Decide how and when you'd like to use the visuals. Will you use the visuals with the entire group of children? Will you use the visuals for an individual child?
2. **Select which visuals you want to use for the group and/or for an individual child.** Which visuals represent rules that are important for your learning environment?

Tips:

- Engage with families to learn about rules and expectations in their community. Make more visuals as needed.
 - If you create new visuals, carefully plan how you'll state the rules and the language you'll use — make statements in terms of what you want to see in the behavior, rather than saying what not to do. For example, say "Walking feet" instead of "Don't run."
 - Translate the rules into the languages spoken by the children in your learning environment or make separate visuals for each language.
3. **Select the format of the visual support you will use.** The format of these visual supports, which are drawings, will meet the needs of some toddlers. But to be most effective, visual supports should match the developmental needs of the children in your environment. Some toddlers may not yet understand the connection between the drawing and the behavior it represents. These children may benefit from a more concrete visual format, such as a photo.

Tip: Help children understand the expectations by giving a very specific example, such as photos of the children in your environment using the expected behaviors themselves.

There are a range of visual support formats, ranging from most concrete to most abstract, including:

- Real object
- Miniature versions of object
- Photograph of real object
- Photograph of non-identical object
- Drawing
- Printed words

Tip: If a visual is too abstract and the child doesn't understand the relationship between the symbol and the item or activity, it won't be successful in supporting their participation, independence, or behavior.

4. Print the visuals.

- Use them as a portable "key ring" visual support.
 - Cut out individual cards or photos and laminate them.
 - Punch a hole in the cards and put them on a ring so you can carry them easily with you to use as needed throughout the day.
- Use them as a chart.
 - Print the entire visual support grid and laminate or place in a sheet protector.
 - Post the chart at children's eye level in different areas of the environment. Make sure the chart is easy to see and access.

5. **Use rules and expectations visuals.** Introduce the visuals to children throughout the day to teach the rules and expectations. Describe the visuals — label the expectation, model the behavior, and have children practice it.

Tips:

- Talk about rules and expectations and practice the behaviors when children are feeling calm. It will be easier for them to engage and use the behaviors. Don't wait until children are engaged in an unsafe behavior to introduce the rules and expectations visuals.
- Introduce each rule separately so children don't become overwhelmed with learning too many rules at once.
- Ask children with language or communication delays to repeat the rule or point to the corresponding picture to ensure comprehension. Ask the child, "Which picture says, 'One finger touch'?"

Throughout the day, notice when there might be an opportunity for a child to use an expected behavior and show them the visual. Explain, "When you play with friends, use a gentle touch." or "We are going inside, it's time for a quiet voice."

Tip: Be ready to give more support as needed to an individual child. For example, show a child the rules and expectations visual supports before times when they are likely to get dysregulated and use unsafe behaviors. Model the expected behavior and help the child use it. Give intentional positive feedback when you notice a child using the safe, expected behavior to follow the rules.

6. **Use the visuals to redirect children who are using unsafe or unexpected behaviors.** If you notice a child using an unexpected behavior, gently redirect them by showing them the visual of an expected behavior and explaining, "You can use a one finger touch" or "We take turns". Support the child to use the expected behavior, then give them positive feedback.

Tip: For visual supports to be most useful to infants and toddlers, they should be used consistently each day.



National Center on
Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

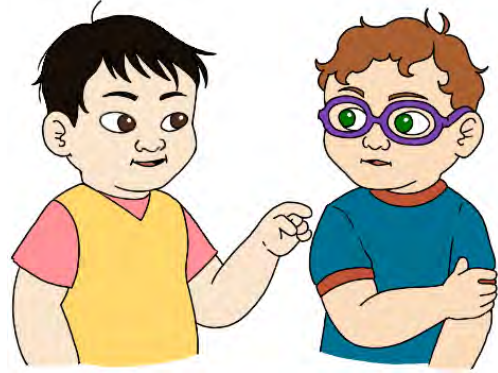
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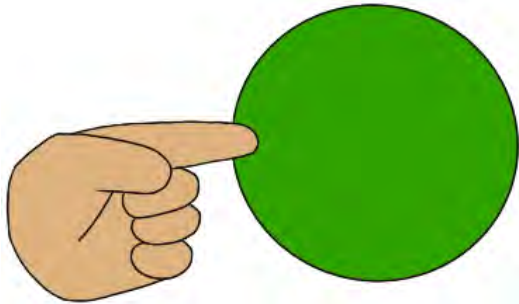
Feet on Floor



Gentle Touch



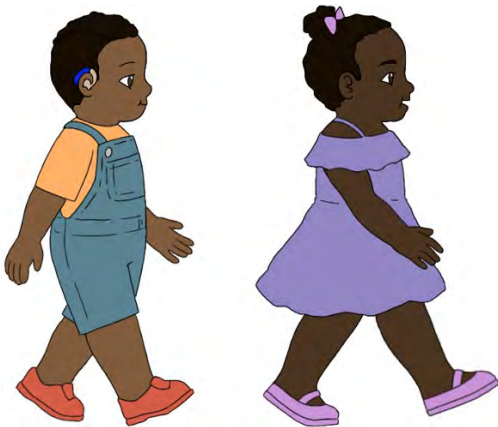
One Finger Touch



Quiet Voice



Walking Feet



Take Turns

