

Visual Support: Break Card

A break card can be used to help a person learn and practice requesting a break. Laminate this page for durability. Ensure the card is easily accessible (on a lanyard, desk, or in a pocket).

How do I teach someone to use a break card?

Begin by modeling how and when to use a break card. When showing the card, say, "This card can be used when you need a break. When you feel tired, frustrated, or need time to rest, you can use this card. Watch me use it." Pick up the card and hand it to the person. Say, "I need a break." Then walk to the designated break area.

Give examples of when the person might need to use the card and set clear rules about where breaks are taken and how long each one can last. After modeling how to use the break card and reviewing the rules for its use, have the person practice using the card to take a break. Say, "Now you try!" Prompt them to hand you the card and walk to the break area. Praise them for using the card.

How do I use a break card in a stressful situation?

Once a person understands how to use the break card when they are calm, they will feel more prepared to use it when they feel anxious or upset.

When the person seems overwhelmed, gently remind them, "You can use your break card." Calmly guide them through the steps again. It is not necessary for them to verbalize, "I need a break," if they are unable to do so in that moment.

Remember to praise the person for using the card and going to the break area even if they are not able to successfully calm themselves.



Mallory, S., Fletcher, A., Ambrosie, A., & CDS DNEA Team. (2024). *DNEA resource guide: Grab and go supports: Visual support: break card*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism
Additional resource guides at <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>.