

Visual Support: "Oops" Picture Word Card

An "Oops" picture word card is used in visual schedules to indicate a change or disruption in the expected sequence of events. It's helpful for people with an intellectual or developmental disability who may rely on visual schedules for predictability. The "Oops" card serves as a gentle and clear signal that something is not going as planned and helps prepare a person for the change, which can reduce anxiety or confusion. Depending on which might work best for the person your are supporting, laminate an "Oops" card on this page for durability.

How do I use an "Oops" card on a visual schedule?

Begin by introducing the card in advance and explaining what the "Oops" card means. Let the person know that when the card appears on their schedule, it means that something unexpected or different has happened, and the schedule will change. Explaining this to the person helps them understand that the change might occur.

When a change is necessary, such as when something is canceled or rescheduled, place the "Oops" card over the original activity or between activities on the schedule. This visually marks the point of disruption and prepares the person for the next steps.

It may be helpful to pre-plan situations to use the "Oops" card that are reinforcing for the person, such as accessing a favorite activity unexpectedly. This will help teach them how to use the card in a low-stress situation. For example, to help someone understand that changes can be positive, use the "Oops" card to introduce a fun, unexpected activity, such as adding a stop for ice cream or visiting a favorite place.

Along with the "Oops" card, it's helpful to verbally explain the change in simple, reassuring language and let the person know what will happen instead.

For example, "It's raining today, and your practice was canceled. I am putting the "Oops" card on top of your practice picture since we will not be going." Provide an alternative activity or clear next steps to minimize distress. "The next thing on your schedule is to stop at grandma's, so we will go there next."



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

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How can I practice using the "Oops" card?

Practicing the "Oops" card is important to help the person you are supporting become comfortable handling unexpected changes. Below is an example of how you might practice using the card in a controlled, non-stressful environment.

Set up a simple visual schedule

Wake up - Brush teeth - Eat breakfast - Get dressed - Go outside



Introduce the "Oops card"

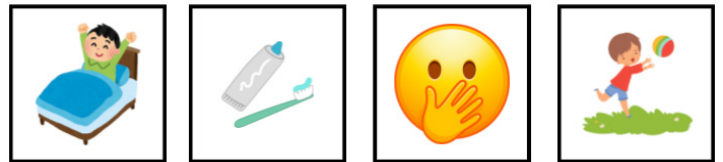
Before starting, explain that today you're going to practice using the "Oops" card. Let the person know that sometimes things don't go exactly as planned, and when that happens, the "Oops" card will let them know there's a change. Reassure them that even if something changes, everything will still be okay.

Practice the schedule

Begin following the routine on the visual schedule. The person wakes up, they brush their teeth, they begin to head to the kitchen for breakfast.

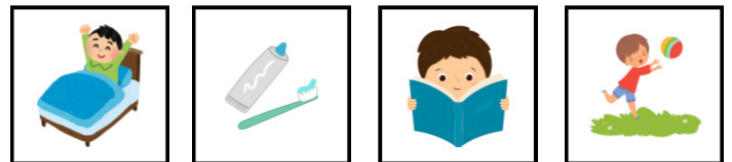
Use the "Oops" card for a small change

When it's time for breakfast, calmly say, "Oops, there's a change!" and place the "Oops" card over the breakfast activity. Explain that breakfast will be late because you need a few extra minutes to finish preparing it. Share they can do a different activity in while waiting, like playing with a toy or reading.



Provide an alternative

Replace the breakfast activity on the schedule with the alternative activity. Use a calm, reassuring tone to explain the change.



Follow through

After a few minutes of the alternative activity, remove the "Oops" card and return to the original plan by moving to the breakfast activity. Reinforce the person for following the "Oops" card and note that the schedule continues, even though there was a small change.

Discuss the experience

After completing the routine, discuss how they felt when the "Oops" card was used. Emphasize that changes can happen but everything turned out okay.

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