How to Implement Visuals Related to COVID-19

by Linda Armstrong and Shannon Sousa, MS, CCC-SLP of Community Autism Resources

What are Visuals:
- Visuals are a way of presenting information in a visual format through using objects, photographs, picture symbols, written language, video demonstration or a combination of multiple visual formats
- Examples of visuals include picture schedules, first-then boards, choice boards, token boards, graphic organizers and social stories

What are Social Stories:
- The concept of a social story was created by Carol Gray in 1991
- Social stories are short descriptions of events or activities that provide an outline of what to expect
- Social stories, which are typically written in the first person, are presented with positive vocabulary and statements such as "I can" or "I will"
- These stories can be customized with photos of the individual and can be written for any event or situation

Why are Visuals Important:
- Many individuals are visual learners who process information better when information can be seen instead of heard
- Visuals take some of the cognitive demand off of processing complex information so that concepts are more accessible
- Especially for situations that are unfamiliar, scary, or emotionally-charged, visuals can help an individual know expectations and work through intense emotions
- Visuals present consistent information in a predictable manner and can serve as a learning support for individuals

How to Implement Visuals Related to COVID-19:
- Remember that visuals are a supplement, not a substitution, for learning information and will likely require multiple exposures prior to understanding
- Use visuals that best correspond to an individual's learning style and motivations
- Depending upon the individual's degree of the concept's understanding, open a dialogue about the topic while encouraging sharing of known information and asking of questions
- Clearly state what the visual is about and why you are using it, tailoring vocabulary and explanation to individual needs (e.g., "This is a story about COVID-19 testing. This is to help us know what to expect when we go to get the swab test.")
- Review the visuals with the individual interactively – simply putting a visual in front of an individual is not going to make a positive difference
- Establish reviewing the visual as part of the routine so that the individual becomes increasingly familiar with the information
- Keep the visual in a predictable location that can be easily accessed by the individual – some families keep visuals in a binder or hanging on the refrigerator

- Use consistent language with visuals, keeping phrases simple so as not to overwhelm with auditory information
- Review the visual each time the individual is engaged with the given activity (for example, reviewing a social story about wearing a mask prior to going to the store)

Be sure to check out our visuals available on the Community Autism Resources website!