Setting Up Individual Student Schedules?

Don't Make These 6 Mistakes

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Mistake #1: Visual mismatch – Your learner doesn't understand what the visuals mean!

This is a very common mistake where the visuals on the schedule do not match the learner's profile.

The result of this is a learner who is confused when they look at the visual because they literally don't know what to do or where to go! (and of course, interfering behaviour ensues!)

To avoid this mistake, assess your learner's ability to engage with visual form you have selected.

You have to determine if your learner understands that the visuals represent (or is a substitute for) other 'things.'

For some learners, you may have to start with simple object-to-object matching. If they have that mastered, you can assess if they can match object-to-photo (and vice-versa). Next, you can check to see if they can match photo-to-photo and then photo-to-object.

(Photos are a 'closer' representation to the actual object; whereas pictures/drawings are not. Remember, any photo/picture/drawing is a 2-D representation of the 3-D object so we can't assume our students will automatically know what we are 'showing' them).

Mistake #2: What's the cue? – Your learner doesn't know the cue or signal to go to the schedule.

I'd say the most common way an educator gets their student to go to the schedule is by giving a verbal instruction – which is fine at times, but it does require the educator to be the one at the centre of the transition (which again, is fine at times).

Another issue that could arise from giving a verbal instruction to transition is that words are fleeting so unless you gain and maintain their attention, they may miss the cue.

To avoid this mistake, it's crucial that students are taught multiple cues:

- Will the end of a task signal the transition?
- Will it be an auditory (timer) cue?
- Will it be a visual?

Mistake #3: Location, location, location!

The specific location of the schedule tends to be overlooked in many classrooms.

To avoid the mistake of placing the schedule in the wrong location, consider these two factors:

- Student profile – If you increase the effort it takes to transition to the schedule, the student may not be motivated to go to it.

- Student schedule – If the student is transitioning to different environments within the school, consider whether the schedule should 'follow' the student.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:
- Will the schedule be brought to the student?
- Will it be stationary? If so, at their desk? Central location in the room?
- Will it be portable?

Mistake #4: Visual overload (or 'underload'?)

A common mistake is simply the number of visuals on the schedule at any given time.

The mismatch between the profile of the student and the visual presentation can have negative effects (e.g., interfering behaviour, switching of visuals, "anxiety," low motivation).

To avoid this mistake, consider the student profile ask yourself:
- Would a first-then, partial day or full day be appropriate?
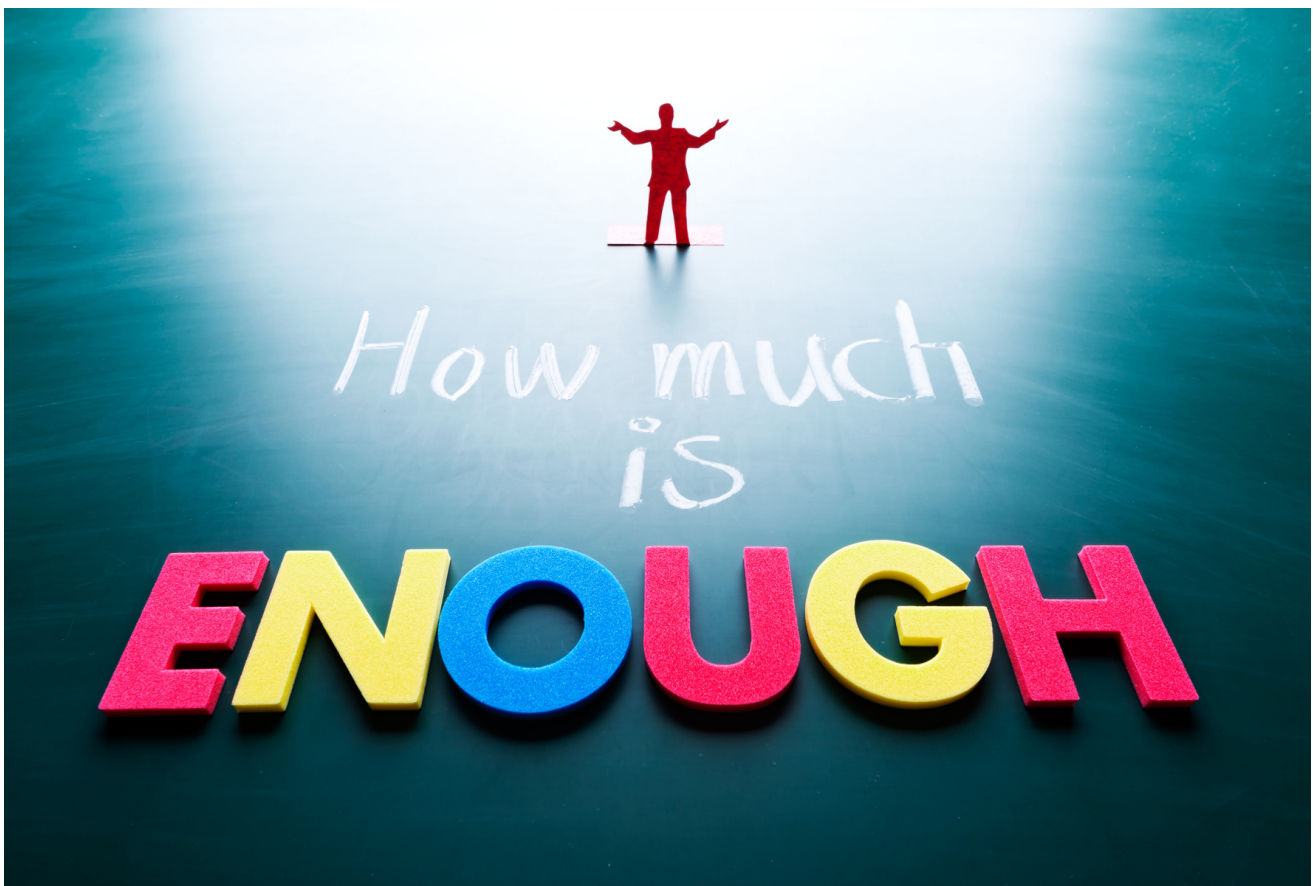
Mistake #5: Can I speak to the manager?

This mistake boils down to errors in the explicit teaching of how to use the schedule. Staff must be clear in how they want the student to manipulate the schedule.

To avoid this mistake, ask yourself this question:
- How will my learner interact with the schedule?

Here are five different ways your student can interact with a schedule:
i) **Carry and Use** (actual objects are the schedule and carried by the student to the location)

ii) **Carry and Match** (student takes visual from the schedule and walks to the area in the room that has the identical visual)

iii) **Check off** (student checks off they have completed the task/activity)

iv) **Move when finished** (Student moves visual from the "To Do" column to "Done" column

v) **Peel off** (student takes visual off visual and puts it in a specific container)

Mistake #6: Visual schedule does not equal motivation

A common mistake, that are little mistakes that build up slowly over time is the inconsistent use or follow-through from using the schedule. This results in your student losing trust and motivation in the schedule and inevitably, YOU!

I'm not talking about the unexpected changes that happen in a day. I'm talking about the imbalance between the work the student is expected to do and the 'reward' for doing it.

Unless engaging in tasks or pleasing staff are reinforcing, it's safe to say that students what to know what's in it for them.

To avoid this mistake, ask yourself:
- Are the things the student likes "signalled" on the schedule?
- Is there a good balance between "work" and "play"?

Need more info on how to avoid these mistakes?

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