

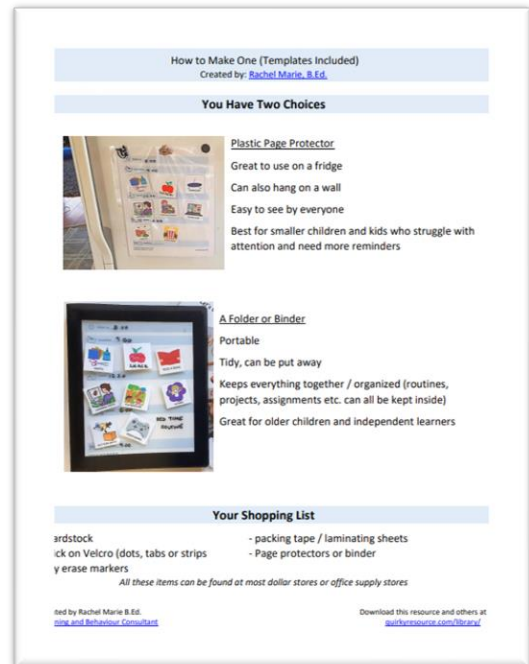
# VISUAL SCHEDULES

## How to Use Them: Steps to Success

By Rachel Marie, B. Ed.

So, you've read [what visual schedules are](#),

and [how to make your own](#)



... You've printed everything off, and put your schedule together....



...and now you're wondering: How do I use this thing?

There are several practical steps you can follow to set up and use your schedule

Created by Rachel Marie B.Ed.  
[Learning and Behaviour Consultant](#)

Download this resource and others at  
[quirkyresource.com/library/](http://quirkyresource.com/library/)

## Create a Card for Every Activity

For your schedule, you will need to **make a visual card for every activity** your child does each week. Your cards should each have a:



There are several cards already provided for you in the [Visual Schedule Template](#) which cover some general activities most children do. These will help you get started.

For your new cards, the **images** you use should be as **clear and concrete** as possible **showing the action or activity**.

You can find cute pictures online for this, draw them,

← Photos can be especially effective

Your cards should also be as **specific to your child** as possible, so you will likely have to adapt some of the ones provided. For Example:

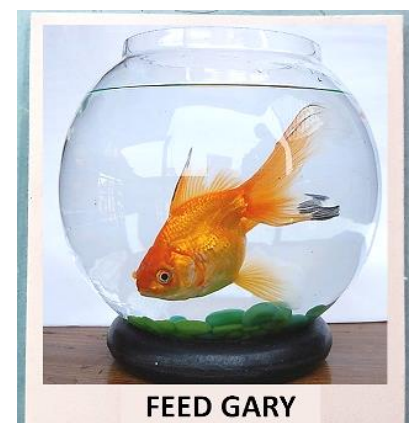
There is a card called:



If your fish is named Gary











Your card should be:



A visual schedule works because it **shows your child** exactly **what activities are happening in their day** so they know exactly what is happening and expected of them. **The clearer** and more concrete your activity cards are, **the easier it will be for them to understand**.

## Some Homework for You

Write or draw all the activities your child does in a typical week:

 <u>Exercise (physical):</u>	 <u>Chores / Jobs:</u>	 <u>Creative / Quiet Time:</u>
 <u>With Family or Friends (Social):</u>	 <u>School / Learning:</u>	 <u>Favorites /Free Time:</u>
 <u>Important (ie appointments)</u>	 <u>Special Events / Occasions:</u>	<u>Other:</u>

*Circle or star any you still need to make a card for, and make it when you can*

## Find Your Child's Natural Pattern

At different points each day your child will be:



Tired



Relaxed

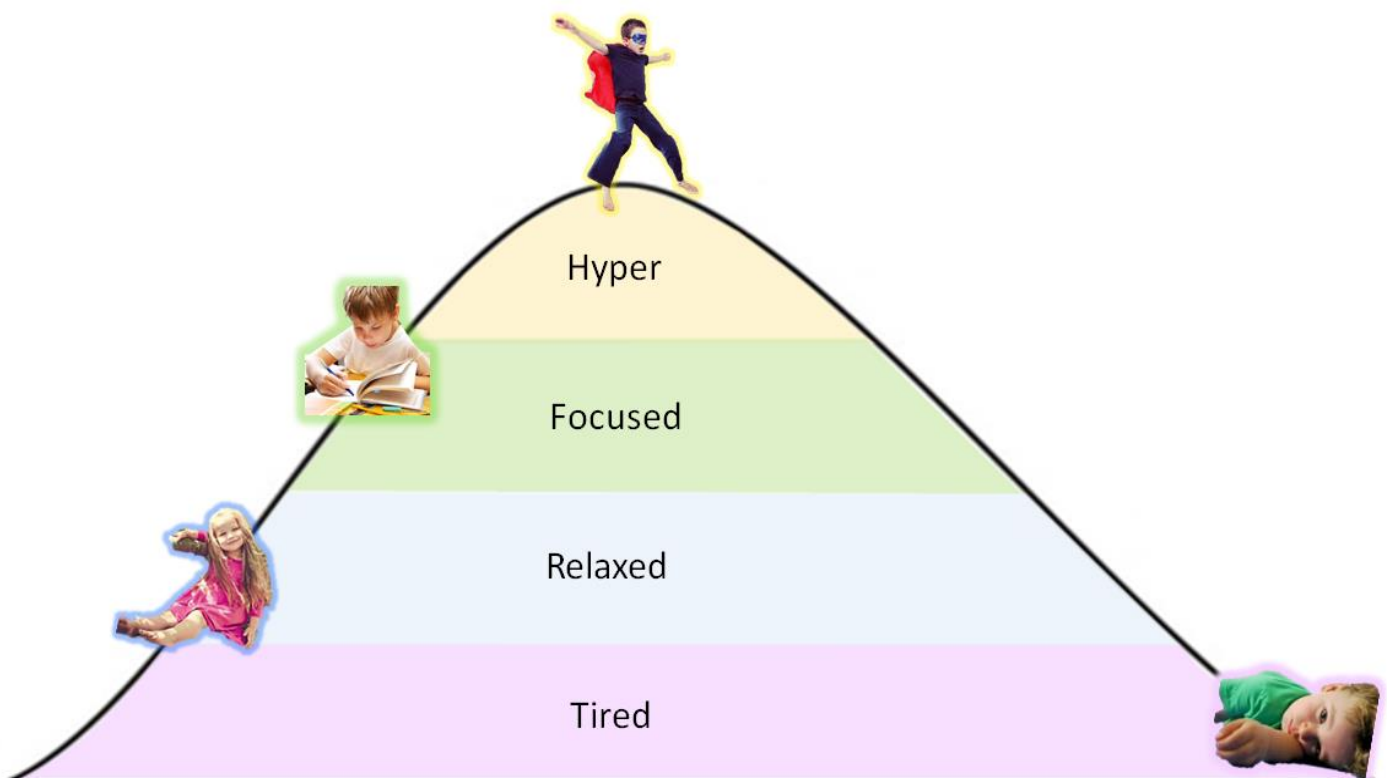


Focused



Energetic

These moods will usually **follow a similar pattern each day**, a pattern of **increased and decreased energy**, “ups” and “downs”

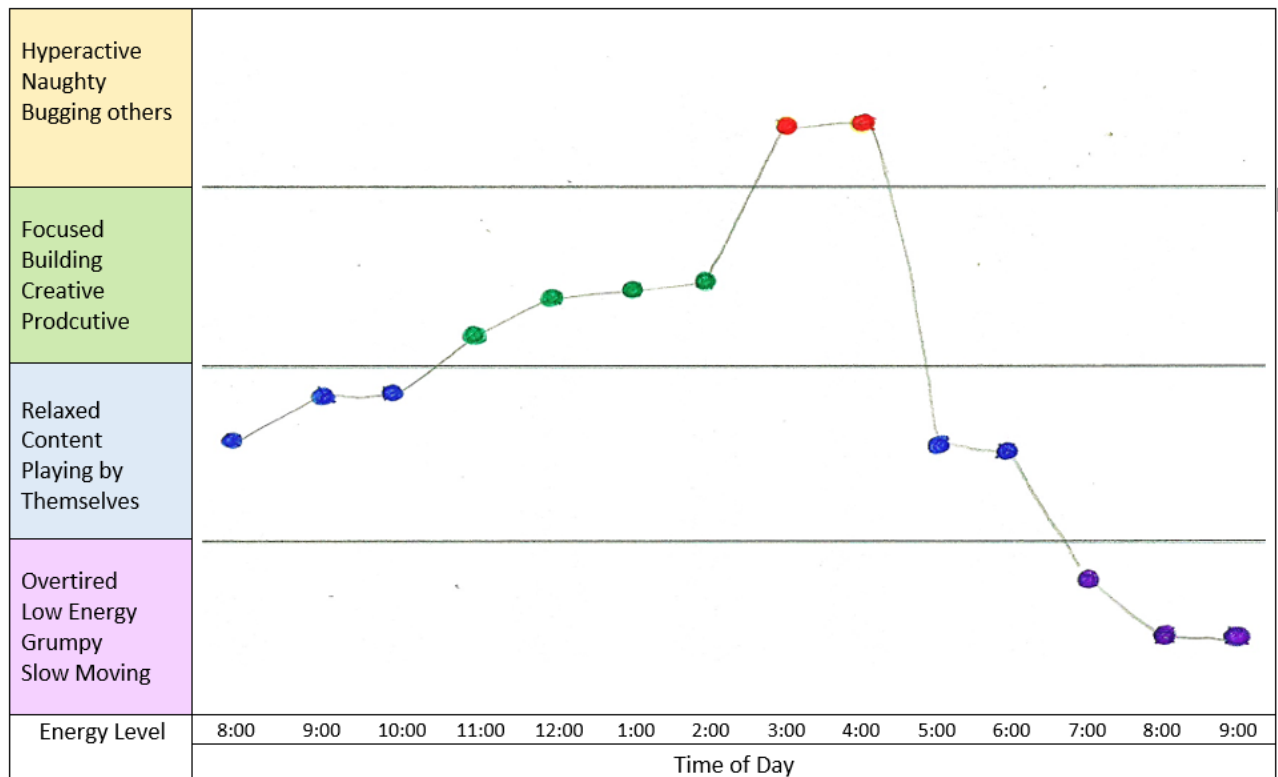


Since certain **moods / energy levels** will usually happen **at a similar time each day**, it is helpful to figure out when these occur. **Learning your child's daily energy** flow allows you to **more effectively plan daily activities**. Here are some tools to help you do that.

You can use the following tracking sheets to record your child's daily energy cycle. Observe your child and mark the space which matches their energy level at each timeslot.

Hyperactive Naughty Bugging others														
Building Creative Productive Focused														
Quiet Content Playing by Themselves														
Low Energy Grumpy Slow Moving														
Energy Level	8:00	9:00	10:00	11:00	12:00	1:00	2:00	3:00	4:00	5:00	6:00	7:00	8:00	9:00
	Time of Day													

Here's an example of how this might look



\*Don't have the sheet with you? Make notes on your phone and fill it in at the end of the day\*\*

## Match Activities to the Energy Levels

There are many **different types of tasks** that your child does each day. Each task **works better with some mood / energy states over others**. For example:

Doing arts and crafts:



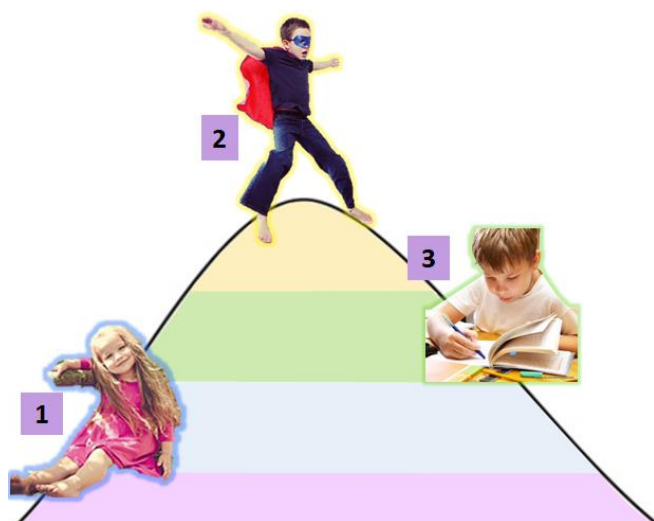
Makes something nice



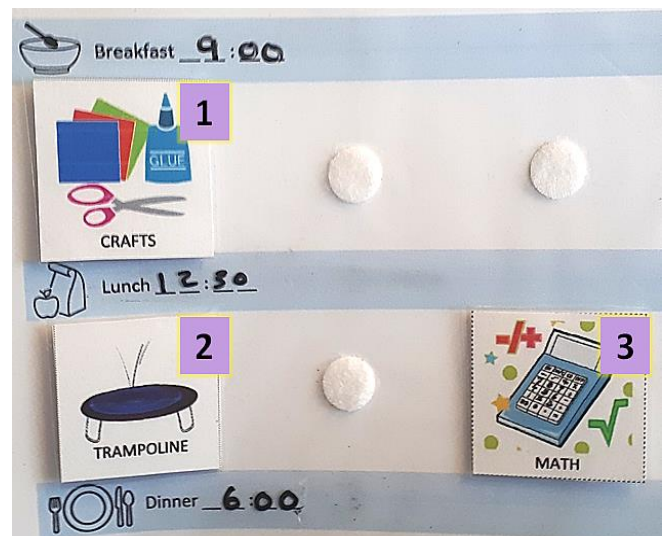
Makes a crazy mess!

Schedules work best when **activities are planned at times that match the child's energy level**. This will make both you and your child much happier! Here's how that looks:

Child's Normal Energy



Planned Activities



Some example activities that work with each state:

Rest  
Calming  
Quiet  
Comforting



Imaginative play

Crafts  
Family time  
Social







School work  
Projects  
Creating / building  
Helping



Exercise  
Play outside  
Heavy jobs / chores

## Your Homework


Use your list of activities from earlier, which mood do they match? Write it below:


			
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Using your energy tracking info decide which time of day to plan each type of activity


Write it on the schedule


Or draw a line across

 Wake up \_\_\_ : \_\_\_

 Breakfast \_\_\_ : \_\_\_

 Lunch \_\_\_ : \_\_\_

 Dinner \_\_\_ : \_\_\_

 Bedtime \_\_\_ : \_\_\_



## Include Physical Needs in Your Schedule

There are certain things your child **needs every day** to remain happy and healthy:



Rest



Exercise



Healthy Food



Social Time

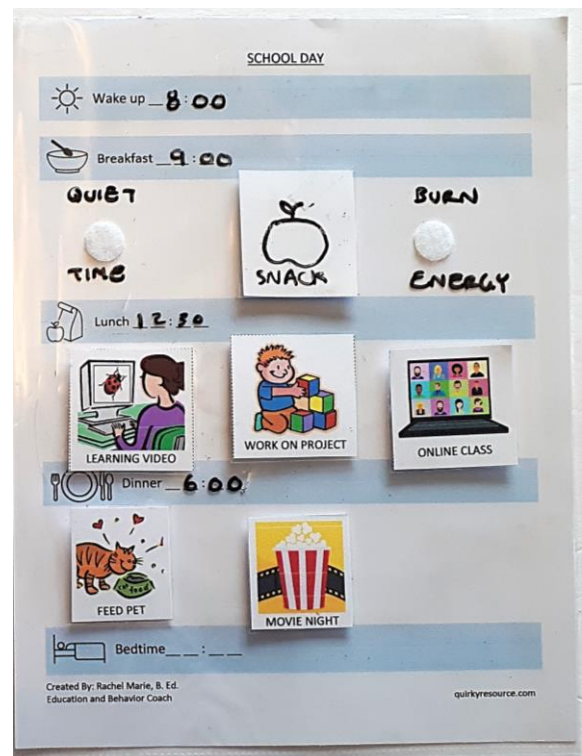
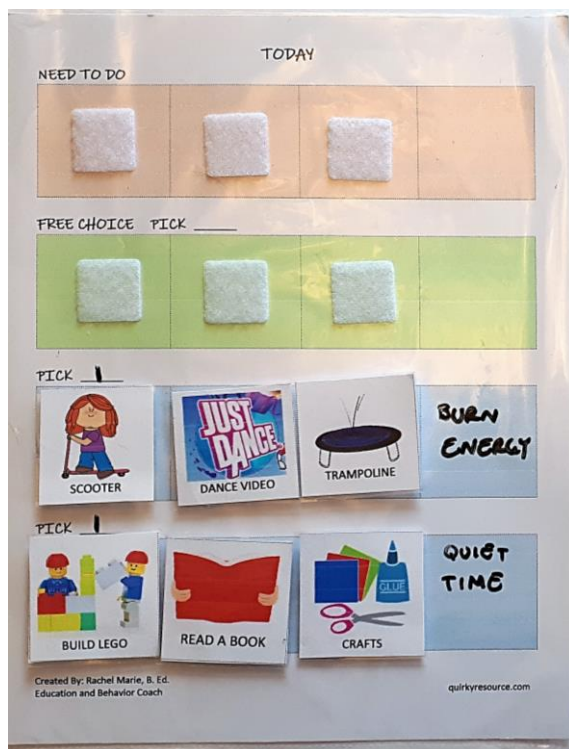


Quiet Time

However, these may also be **activities your child does NOT WANT to do**. A helpful strategy is to **provide them with choices**. For example:

Here the child needs to **choose one card**

And **put it on the schedule** where it belongs



**Choices are also helpful** for encouraging **healthy eating** – by providing a variety of fruits and vegetables to pick from

In each case even though it is something the child needs to do, **being able to decide what it will be** makes it **more motivating** for them.



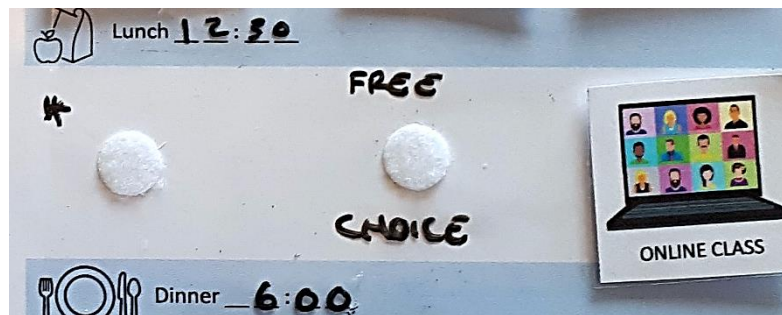
A second method of providing choice is the “if / then” approach. **If the child completes an activity they don’t like, then they get to do one they do like.** This approach works well with eating (*if you eat your vegetables, then you get a treat*), as well as activities:

If this child takes out the garbage

Then they will get to play video games or watch videos



The schedule shows them where to put their choices



The schedule template you downloaded has an “activity tracking sheet.” It is created to help you use both these methods of providing choices which have been shown.



Rest, physical activity, healthy food, social connection, and quiet time are things your child needs, but can be easily forgotten.

**Not meeting these needs often leads to emotional blow ups / meltdowns** when your child becomes overtired, lonely hungry etc

Therefore it is important to **proactively plan these activities** into your schedule. Though your child may not like some of them at the time, they will **help your child be more relaxed, healthy and happy in the long run**

## Use Meals for Transitions



Visual schedules are a **framework** for **planning daily tasks**. It helps block the day into logical segments, **providing the day with structure**.

It is helpful to **use familiar blocks of time that already exist** as a **structure for daily planning**.

Luckily, there are three that happen every day:

Breakfast



Lunch



Dinner



Meals signal change is happening in our day. You can use this familiar habit pattern to **help your child with changes** by planning **different activities before and after a meal**.



**Snack times can also be used to transition** between activities. They **give your child more “fuel”** for what they’re doing next especially for children that eat little at each sitting.

Having a fun, yummy snack gives your child a **positive experience**, and can **increase their energy / motivation** for the next activity.

Family members usually eat together, so transitioning at meals is an opportunity to **check in with your child** and:

- **Give any instructions** needed for the next activity
- **Remind** them of important events / tasks happening later, and **cue them to prepare**
- **Find out if they are starting to feel “off”** (ie sick, sad, upset etc.. ) and need to **change the schedule**.



## Using the Schedule



Now the moment you have been waiting for! Time to start using your schedule.

To plan a day, **put each activity card** on the schedule in the **spot when that activity will happen**. Use the information in this blog, and the “homework” you have done to help you

You can **involve your child** by having them put the activity cards on the schedule with you

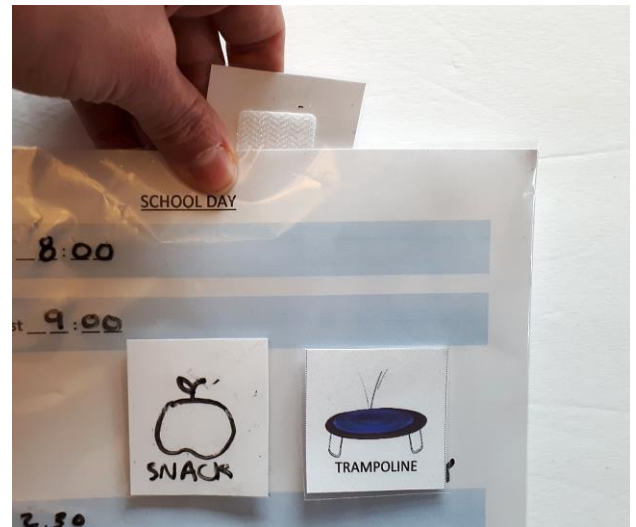
**Put up your schedule where it will be seen**, on a fridge, wall or table.

During the day when your child has completes an activity, have them

Take it off of the schedule



And put it away



Removing the card helps the child **mark in their mind that the task is finished**. In addition, when they look at the schedule, they will now **only see what is still left to do**.

For you this is a **quick way to know what has already been done vs still needs to be done**.

**All cards** should be **kept together**, and **always in the same spot**. The simplest place is the back of the page protector (as pictured above). A designated pouch / container also works

## Your Homework



**Practice using the schedule with your child!** Some suggested steps are:

**Step 1 – Do it Together:** each time an activity is finished, walk over to the schedule with your child, take off the card and put it away.

**Step 2- Verbal Reminders:** Ask they child to go take off the card each time they complete an activity. If the remembered on their own, give them a reward

**Step 3 – Check at Meal Times:** When your child comes to eat, check the schedule, give a reward for each one they remember, and have the put away any the missed

**Step 4 – Occasional Reminders:** Leave your child to do their schedule semi-independantly, and set up goals / rewards (ie \_\_\_ many cards = \_\_\_ min of screen time) Check during the day if they have forgotten, ask them to go remove the card, and celebrate when they do remember.



Gummies



Stickers



X Min of Screentime

Are all easy rewards to use. Having **rewards will make the schedule a positive experience** for your child, and help **motivate them to remember** to take off cards on their own.

## What About “Off Days”

Some days look like this:



And others like this:



**There will be days** where your child is sick, overtired, sensitive etc... and **will not be able to follow their schedule** as normal. So, what should you do?



- 1. Let go of what you planned to do that day**
- 2. Refocus on meeting your child’s emotional and / or physical needs**
- 3. Bring them the objects they find comforting** (a blankie, favourite foods, teddy etc...)
- 4. Re-plan the day with activities that are calming, and comforting for your child**
- 5. Monitor their mood.** If it improves you can return to **regular tasks**, if it **doesn’t keep doing calming / comforting things with them**

**Screentime** may seem like a good comforting activity, but often **leads to more grumpiness**. You can choose to be more flexible around screentime on off days, but it will be **more effective to use calming activities that engage your child in something positive and productive** like: social time with you (snuggling, reading, baking), creative play (lego building, crafting), or active rest (listening to music, solo reading, colouring).

## Your Homework



### Put together an “off day” bin

Pick up some simple fun activities and put them in a bin. Pictured are some suggestions:

- Simple dollar store crafts
- Putty / playdough
- Stuffy
- Colouring
- A treat / snack
- A story you can read together

Also gather any other items special to your child that they usually use to sooth (ie a blankie, favourite movie, special teddy etc).

Put them in your bin

Next time your child has an off day, you can pull out the bin and be ready to go.

### Pre Plan Some “off days”

Put together a few schedules that only have activities your child enjoys and finds relaxing

You can also include some “special” activities like baking a cake, a movie night, going to visit a friend / family member, etc...

Take a picture of it with your phone, and keep the photo in a special folder.

The next time your child has an “off day,” you can pull up your photo and use the fun schedule you’d planned



“Off days” can be so overwhelming it is **hard to think in the moment** what you should do. **Having these items prepared ahead of time will give you plenty of effective options to help your child without needing to do any additional planning.**

## Summary

There are some steps that will help you start using a visual schedule with your child. They have been discussed in this blog, and can be summarized as the following:

- Preparation
  - List and make a visual card for every activity your child does
  - Find out how / when your child's energy changes in a typical day
  - Decide which activities they do match each type of energy level
- Planning
  - Plan each activity at the time that it matches your child's energy level
  - Include your child's physical needs as planned activities
  - When there is an activity your child doesn't like, give them choices
  - Use meals and snacks to break up / transition between different activities
- Using it
  - Put the activities on the Schedule in the order the child will be doing them
  - When an activity is done, take it off and put it away
  - Plan ahead for "off days" when the schedule doesn't work

## One Final Note



Every child is unique and what works best for them will be as unique as they are!

The templates provided are a starting point to help you begin using these tools. Feel free to play around and adapt them. You will discover other ways of making your schedule which work better for your child. You may even end up with different versions over time. That's great! The more you personalize your tools, the more successful they will be!