The Road Towards Independence:
Living and Working with Autism

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The Treatment and Learning Centers
TLC

TLC – The Treatment and Learning Centers

- The Treatment and Learning Centers is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1950 in Rockville, MD
- We serve nearly 2,000 people yearly with a wide range of special needs.
- Our mission is to improve the lives and expand possibilities for individuals with disabilities through offering a family of services within one organization.

TLC – Our Programs

- The Katherine Thomas School
- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- The Family Hearing Center
- Psycho-educational Evaluations
- Tutoring and Coaching
- Summer Programs
- The Outcomes Service

TLC's Outcomes Services

- Helping adults with disabilities live independently and find and keep jobs through supported employment.
- Services
  - Vocational Assessment & Career Discovery
  - Supported Employment (SE)
  - Community Learning Service (CLS)
  - Personal Support (PS)
  - Transitioning Youth (TY)
  - Transitional Advocacy (TA)

The Outcomes Service - Funding

- Funding is received through the
  - Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)
  - Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)
  - Private fee for services

Statistics on Autism

- 1 in 68 American children with autism, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- A new government survey of parents suggests that 1 in 45 children, ages 3 through 17
- In the State of Maryland: 1 in 60 children.
  - Boys 1in 37. Girls 1in 179 girls were identified with ASD
- The 1 in 150 children counted in the first 2007 CDC prevalence report are now adults.

"If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism," *By Dr. Stephen Shore*

Individualization

- Every individual on the autism spectrum is different, and as a result, the skills taught to develop independence, as well as the pace at which they are taught, will vary significantly across the spectrum.

Independence

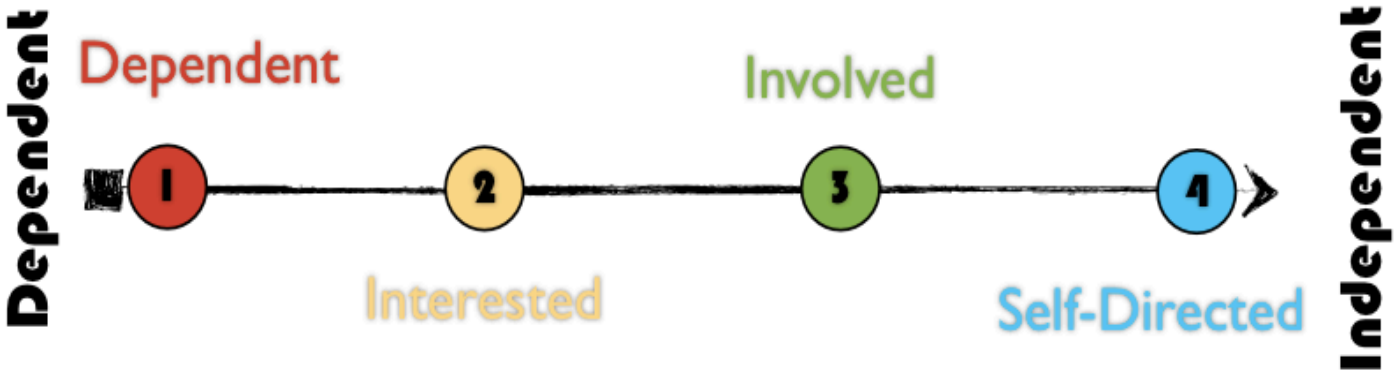
- What does "independence" mean for you in regards to the individual?
- What expectations do you want to set?
- What areas require growth in independence?
- What practical strategies can you use?

Barriers to Independence

- Generalizing is difficult for many people with cognitive disabilities.
- Executive function challenges – a struggle with sequencing, planning, predicting, and focusing attention
- Motivation can be a problem. Rewards can help.

Developing Independence

- The goal is to increase independence not perfection
- Start young and keep going



Setting High Expectations

- Expect that the individual will do things, for him/herself even if it is quicker and easier to do it yourself.
- Expect chores to be done
- Expect self care tasks will be done
- Expect good manners
- Expect increased independence and social appropriateness over time.

Photo: Glenda Powers/dollarphotoclub.com

Developing Independence

Eleven areas to work on …

- Communication Skills
- Social Skills & Behaviors
- Personal-Care Skills
- Safety Skills
- Home-Care Skills
- Meal Preparation Skills
- Money Skills & Shopping
- Leisure & Recreation
- Community Integration & Travel Training
- Employment Skills
- Self Advocacy

Building Independence

- Strategies for facilitating independence for people on the Autism Spectrum.
  - υ Promote independence over accuracy
    - Avoid prompt dependency, Fade out prompting
  - υ Teach Self Management
    - Behavior, Personal-Care
  - υ Provide Structure & Consistency
    - Environment, Routines, Time
  - υ Use Visual Supports

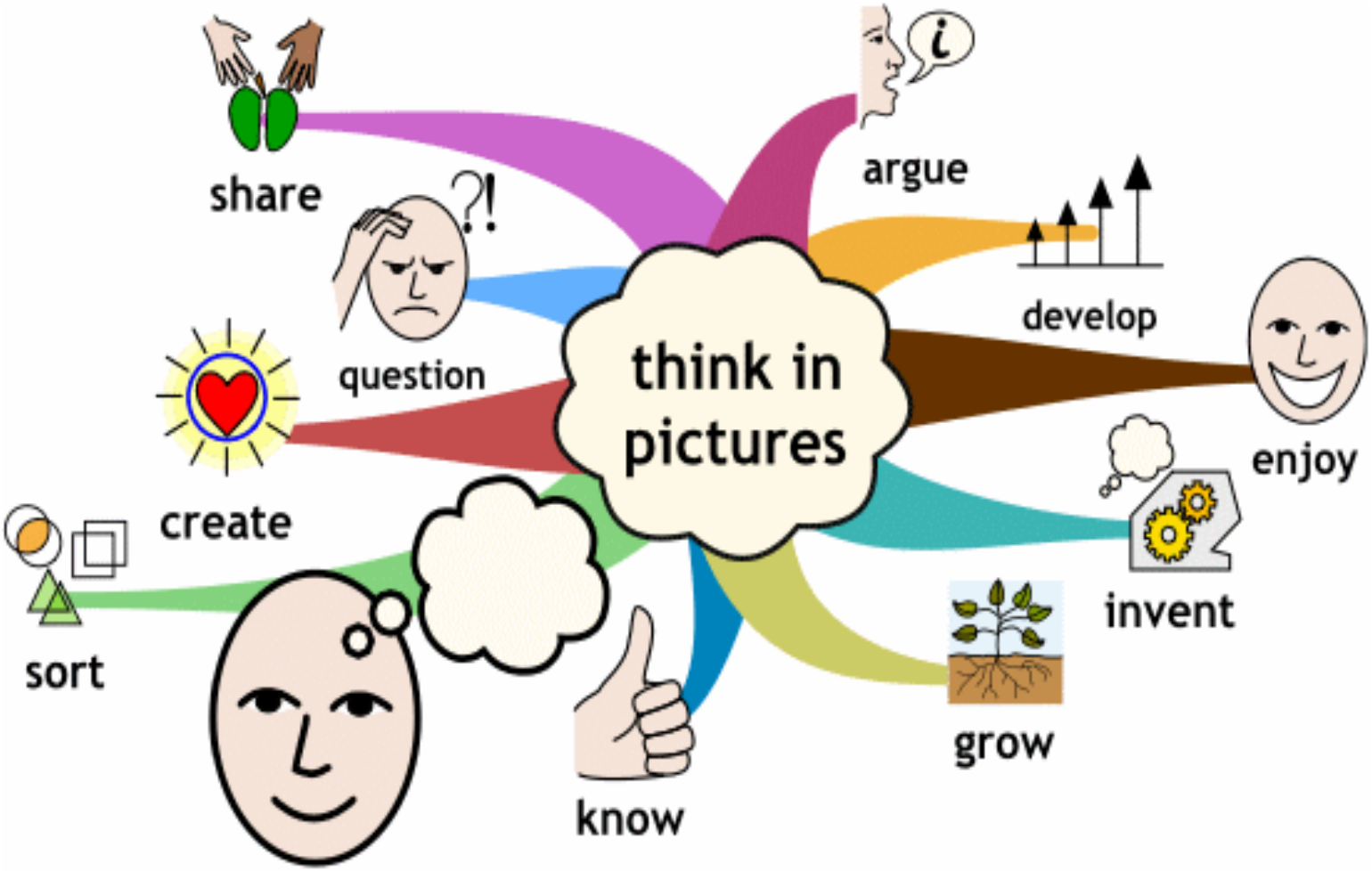
Visual Supports – The Benefits

- Presenting information in a visual way can help support communication and the ability to process information.
- It can promote independence, build confidence and raise self-esteem.
- Visual support is beneficial regardless of age or skill ability.
- It's an opportunity to communicate without complications.

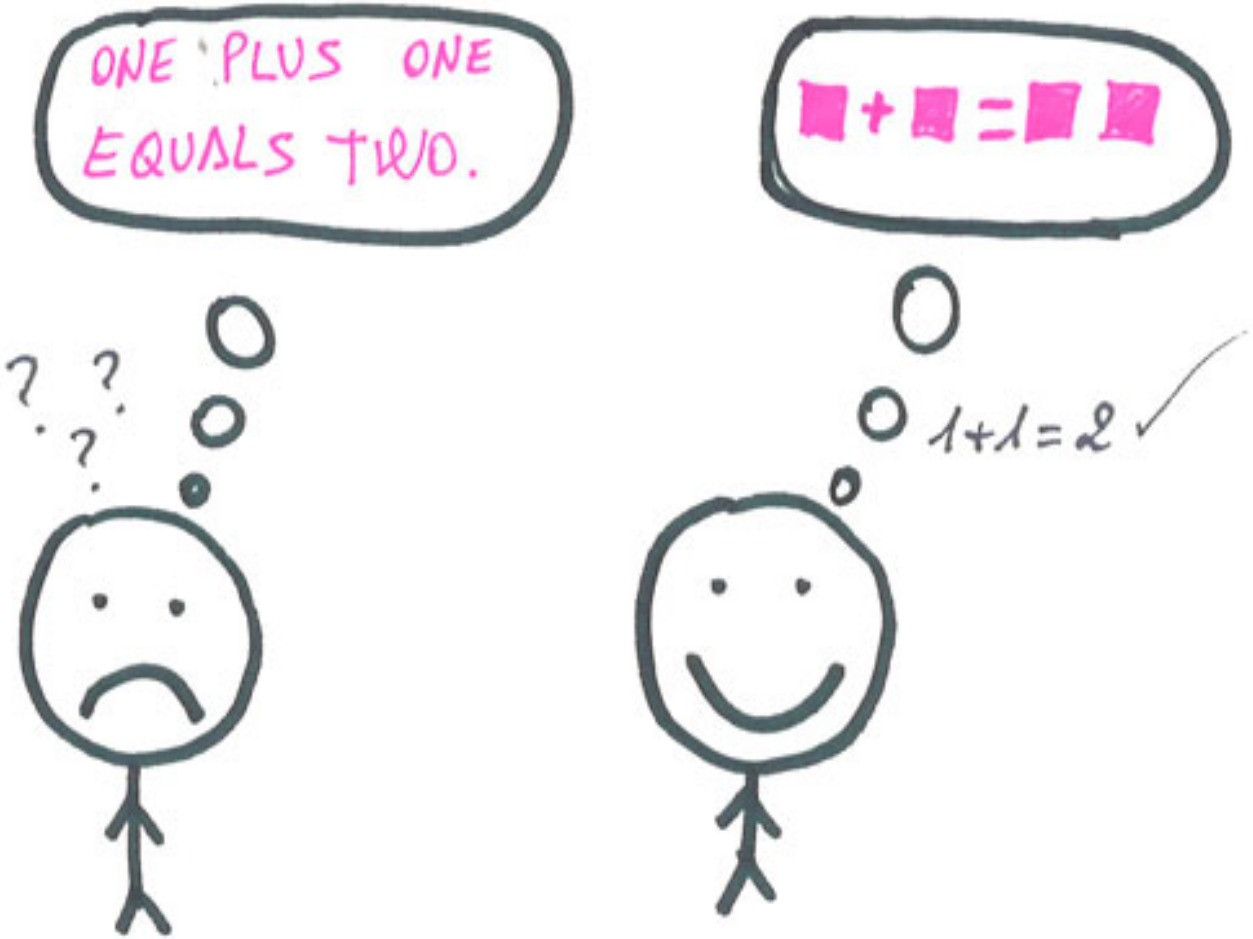
Visual Thinking

- "I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me…when somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures… One of the most profound mysteries of autism has been the remarkable ability of most autistic people to excel at visual spatial skills while performing so poorly at verbal skills." (Grandin, 1995. p19)

Thinking in Pictures



VISUAL THINKING MATTERS.



Teaching with Pictures

More Teaching with Pictures

Laundry

Washing Machine

1. Put dirty clothes in machine.
2. Add 4 scoops detergent.
3. Move dial to 12 minutes.
4. Pull dial to start.

Dryer

1. Put in wet clothes.
2. Empty lint screen.
3. Turn dial to 55 minutes.
4. Press start.

Areas Visual Support Can Help

- Schedules and time management
- Transition and change – Now, Next, Upcoming
- Behavior
- Starting and finishing activities
- Sequential instructions and reminders
- Choice
- Social skills
- Safety
- Structuring the environment
- Increase independent living skills

Structured Work Systems

Visual Supports @ Work

Visual Supports Anywhere

Schedules

Look in throat
Say "Ahh"
Listen to heart
Listen to back
DONE

Wednesday
Play
Work
Work
Snack
Outside
Work
Work
Lunch
Bathroom, brush teeth
Wash the table
Work
Go Home

Visual Supports @ Home

Line Drawings

Time for bed

- ❑ Put on pajamas
- ❑ Use the bathroom
- ❑ Wash hands
- ❑ Brush teeth
- ❑ Get a drink
- ❑ Read a book
- ❑ Get in bed and go to sleep

Checklist

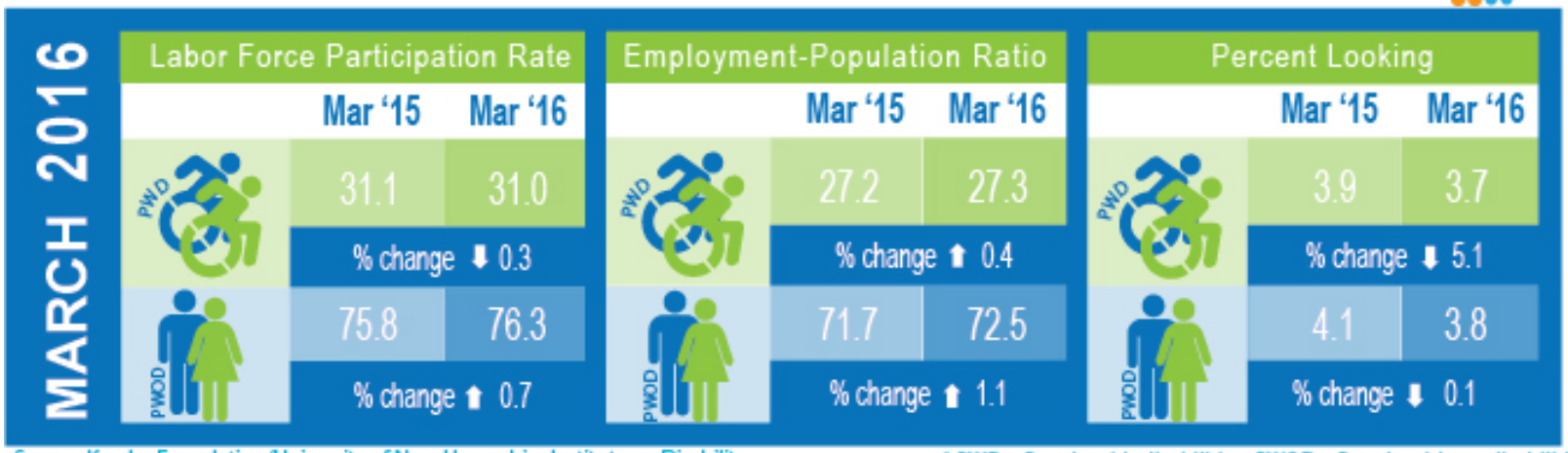
Hierarchy of Visual Supports
Highest - Lowest

- Written phrase or sentence
- Written word
- Black and white line drawing
- Colored drawing
- Photograph
- Object
- Physical gesture

Assistive Technology

National Trends in Disability Employment

national Trends In Disability Employment:
Comparison of People With and Without Disabilities
(March 2015 and March 2016)



Source: Kessler Foundation/University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability

* PWD – People with disabilities; PWOD – People without disabilities

Employment Preferences

- Interest Inventory
- Skills & Abilities
- Stamina
- Work environment
- Location of employment
- Transportation

Employment Options

- Customized Employment
  - Montgomery County Public Intern Position
  - Project Search
- Competitive Employment
  - Schedule A Letter
  - Disclosure?
- Creative Employment
  - Self Employment
  - Family owned business (bookstore)

Steps to securing and maintaining employment

- Networking
- Resume
- Interviewing
- Landing the job
- Maintaining the job

Networking

- Who do I know that can assist in finding meaningful employment?
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Acquaintances
  - Companies that publicly promote hiring individuals with disabilities

Resume building

- Skills based resume
- Experience based resume
- Visual resume
- Portfolio
- Letters of recommendations
- References

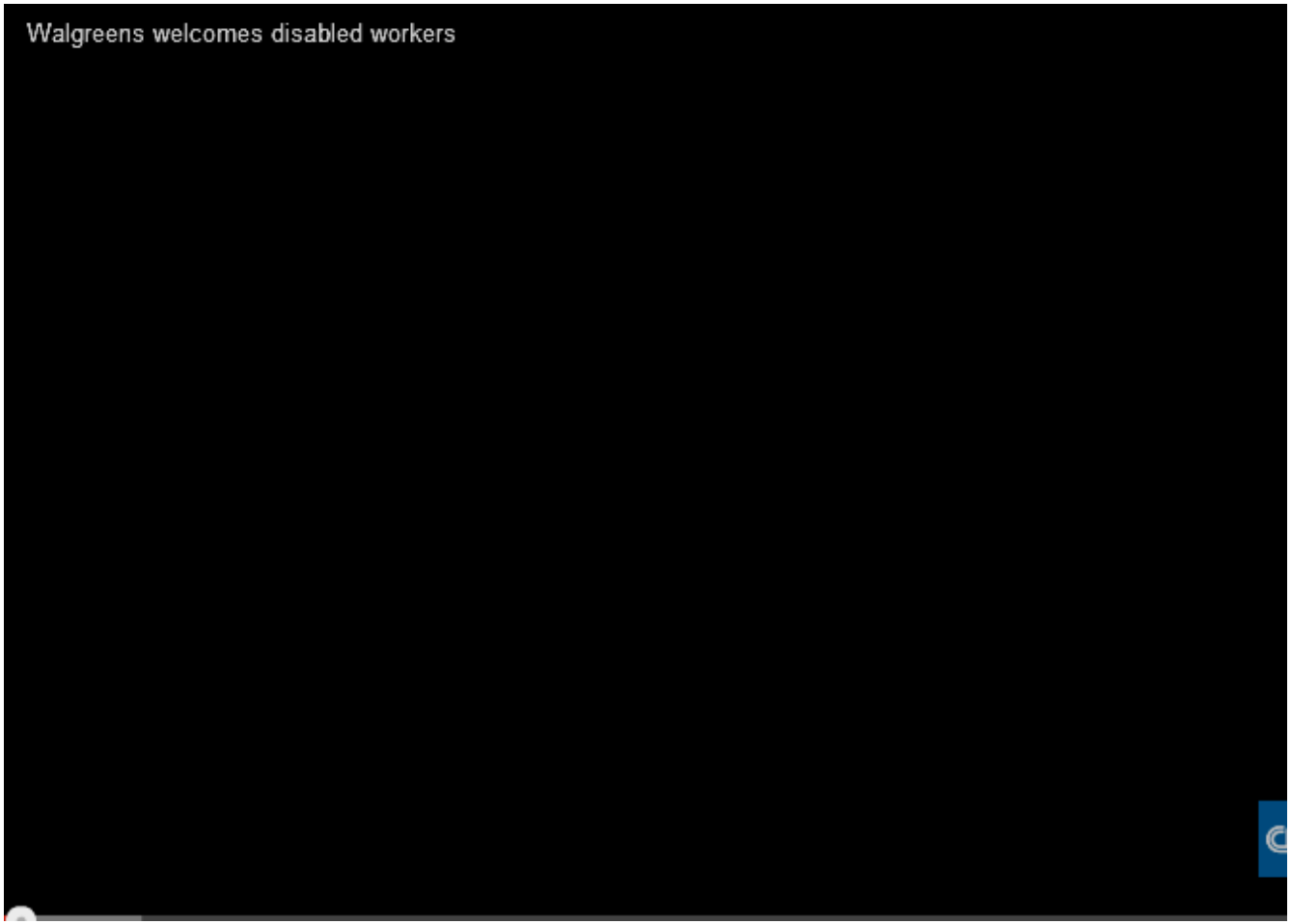
Interviewing

- Visual resume/portfolio
- Research employer
- First Impressions
- Scripting
- Be prepared for working interview
- Get contact information
- Always send a Thank You!

Landing the Job

- Timeline
- Training staff/coworkers
- Preparing for staff support
- Accommodations in the workplace

Maintaining the job

- Natural job supports
  - Supportive coworkers
- Outside job supports
  - Job coaching
    - Job Coaching Procedures
    - Tools/ checklists
  - Behavioral supports
    - Monitoring/communication
  - Phase out
  - Self Advocacy

Video