

Visual Supports: Environmental Labels

What are environmental labels?

Environmental labels promote independence by clarifying what happens in a particular space or what is contained or located in a space (Rutherford et al., 2020).

Why use environmental labels?

- Promote safety and independence.
- Help people understand how to find and use different objects.
- Explain different parts of a room or space.

Examples of environmental labels

Pictures and words on bins that say what is inside them.	A stop sign on a door to stop a person from leaving a space.	A label on a towel bar that says, "hang up towel."	Labels on items in the bathroom (toothbrush).
			

How do I use environmental labels ?

Choose what to label

Find objects or areas that are abstract or unclear to the person.

Make the visual label

Make a label that matches the person's age and understanding of shapes, pictures, and words.

Teach the label

Show the label and explain in clear, simple words what the object or area is used for. Show the person how to use it.

Prompt

If needed, prompt the person to look at the label to know what to do.

Use in different areas

Use visual labels in many different areas.

Reinforce

When the person uses the visual label, use positive reinforcement (such as praise) to reinforce the use of the label.

Adapt as needed

As the person becomes more independent or their understanding changes, adapt labels as needed. For example, you might change a label with a picture to a label with words.

Additional resource guides at <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>.

Reference: Rutherford, M., Baxter, J., Grayson, Z., Johnston, L., & O'Hare, A. (2020). Visual supports at home and in the community for individuals with autism spectrum disorders: A scoping review. *Autism*, 24(2), 447-469. <https://doi.org.proxy.library.upenn.edu/10.1177/1362361319871756>

Suggested citation: Curtin, E., Fletcher, A., Mallory, S., & CDS DNEA Team (2024). *DNEA resource guide: Visual supports: Environmental labels*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism.