

Picture Cards



They're Not Just for Visual Learners!



By Tara Bertic

Flash cards, picture cards...what comes to mind when you think of these? Do you picture those decks of ABC and multiplication facts cards that you use to flip through with speed and hopefully accuracy, either as a child yourself or with your own children? Sure those cards are still out there and they're wonderful, but did you know there are other benefits to "flash" cards or picture cards, and they're not just educational?

I have a son with Autism. And if there's one thing a typical autistic loves, it's routine. Jeremiah hates nothing more than when I throw a few unexpected curveballs into our routine on any given day. Of course, there are unforeseen circumstances or emergencies that arise, but I'm talking about a spontaneous trip to a mall or grocery store. Meltdowns would follow these interruptions to his schedule and those are unpleasant for the entire family, trust me! Still, does that mean I should never be able to jump up and run an errand or zip to the post office to get a package off? I was beginning to think so. Then my friend whose son is autistic introduced me to picture cards and, after adapting them to fit Jeremiah's needs, peace has ensued! Not to say there are never any meltdowns anymore. He has autism, remember?! But the ones he has as a result of our daily schedule and routines are virtually obsolete.

But does your child have to have a "special need" or be a visual learner for picture cards to work for them? No way! I quickly discovered so many other uses for these cards with my other children, and even the children in our kids' ministry at church, that my head was bursting with ideas. Before I knew it, I had become a lean, mean, laminating machine! So untapped are the ideas for the ways picture cards can be implemented anywhere, anytime, that I decided to unload my brain onto these pages, prayerfully to the benefit of others.

Tools of the Trade

We homeschool and so are very sensitive to the financial resources (or lack thereof) of others. In current economic times, even families where both parents work outside of the home have to be more budgeted with their incomes.

Still, there are a number of tools you will need to get you started on making your own picture cards. A few are mandatory, but others are optional. You know your family's finances and so you are the best judge of what you absolutely have to have to get started and what you can borrow or wait on and plan for. Also, different uses for the picture cards might mean needing a few additional or different resources, but I mentioned those in each section when applicable. Here are the basics.

- *Laminator* - Technically, you could go to any local printing or copying outlet to have your cards laminated, but you will spend more money in the long run, as standard at-home use laminating machines only cost about \$40.



- *Laminating Pouches*



- *Paper*

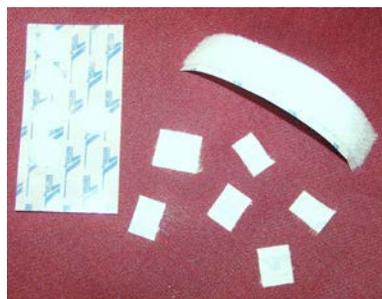
- *Computer*
- *Pinter (best if color)*
- *Digital Camera (optional)*
- *Storage Case for Supplies (optional)*



- *Foam Board*



- *Velcro*



- *Scissors*

- *Goo Gone* (optional, but be prepared to gunk up your scissors cutting the Velcro)



- *Recycled Baby Wipes Containers or Shoe Boxes* (optional)



- *Ziploc Bags* (varying sizes)



Now before you begin card making, there's one more resource you will need, and it's the most important of all.

<http://mrsriley.com/home>

That's right, it's a website. But it's not just any website. It is THE website for making picture cards. It uses PageBuilder, a user-friendly (even for beginners) application that lets you create your cards from clip art photos, photos you personalize and upload, or photos other users have shared. You simply drag and drop, put captions if you want them on the cards, select how many cards you want to print on each page, and you're set. And oh yeah, the best part of Mrs. Riley is the cost. It's a meager \$5 a month and no

subscription or contract is required. So if you print all the cards you need in two months, then you pay only \$10 for the resource.

And no need to fret over the time it will take you to learn using the site eating up your month. First off, there is no learning curve. It's just that simple. Secondly, Mrs. Riley offers a free trial. Check the site out for testimonials and the ever-growing list of people, both professional and non, taking advantage of all Mrs. Riley has to offer.

One more thing before we start talking about the cards themselves, what they can be used for, and examples. Here are some important tips for picture card making:

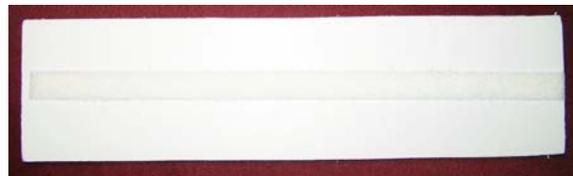
- Once your cards are printed, cut them out before laminating them. You can arrange multiple cards into one laminating pouch to make the most of the pouch space, but you need to cut them out first or the laminating seal will not work around the paper's edges after you cut them. Yes, this means you'll have to cut the cards out twice, once before laminating and once after, but hey, aren't these for your kids anyway? Enlist them...and your husbands too. Or host a card making co-op and set up stations so everyone's cards get done at once. Be creative!
- The best Velcro to use is the kind that is sold by the feet or yard. There are Velcro "dots" out there that make Velcro'ing your cards easier than having to cut the Velcro into small applicable squares with scissors, but the dots do not come in bulk and are more expensive. Besides, you'll need the strips of Velcro for your foam boards anyway.

Now, let the real fun begin. A warning though! Picture card making is addictive and can be harmful to obsessive-compulsives as they discover even more ways than what follows to implement these cards! Lucette, you created a monster!

Visual Schedules



I already went into the details that led to the need for visual schedules so I won't repeat myself. After making the cards, laminating and Velcro'ing them, I made my foam board strips.



Your foam board strips can be as long or as short as you want them to be. Cut the desired amount and then put a strip of Velcro down the middle. I made several of these so that I could represent different times of our day. One strip is from getting up to lunchtime, one from lunch to dinner, and the other from dinner to bedtime. I line the cards up in order of Jeremiah's day and then, as he completes each part of his day, he pulls the picture card off and puts it in his recycled baby wipes container.

Both the boards and containers are easy to take with you so that, during errands, cards can be pulled off and your little one can see how their day is progressing and what's coming next. I keep the unused schedule cards in a gallon-sized Ziploc baggie until I need them.

Each card has a picture on it, as well as the written words. Jeremiah cannot read yet, but as he begins to, he will better be able to match pictures to their words by using these cards. It's a great pre-reading skill.

My older kids love the schedule strips as well. My husband takes one child a week out on a "daddy date". Seeing whose turn it is on the visual schedule ends the memory jogging and arguing over whose date was last week's and whose is this one's.

Here are some examples of cards to make for your visual schedule strips:

- Put Deodorant On (Yes, preteens do have to be reminded of this until it becomes a habit!)
- Brush Hair
- Brush Teeth
- School
- Sports Game/Practice (hockey, baseball, basketball, etc...)
- Store
- Mall
- Eating Out
- Fun Places (Busch Gardens, Disney, etc...)
- Library
- Grandma's House
- Friend's House (Be specific on your cards.)
- Bedtime
- Take Medicine
- Dentist
- Doctor
- Haircut
- Bath/Shower
- Grocery Store
- Chores
- Field Trip
- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Wake-Up
- Make Bed
- Get Dressed
- Put PJ's On
- Help Mom Make Dinner
- Church
- Movies
- Dinner
- Breakfast
- Lunch
- TV Time
- Video Games
- Computer Time
- Bank

- Youth Group/Pioneer Clubs/Award's
- Daddy/Mommy Date
- Sleepover
- Birthday Party
- Swimming
- Playground/Park
- Ride Bikes
- Playdate/Playgroup
- Book It!
- Write in Prayer Journal
- Hug Your Mom/Dad (Throw in a few cute ones like these. They love them!)

First/Then



Patience is another virtue kids tend to lack early on and Jeremiah is no exception. His favorite phrase is, "It's taking forever!" And it could have only been five minutes!

My friend Lucette that I spoke of earlier made me a First/Then chart. Basically, she took a piece of construction paper (cardstock works too) and she folded it in half (top to bottom). At the top of one side, she put the word, "First" and at the top of the other side, she put the word, "Then". She laminated the paper then, refolded it, and put a piece of Velcro centered under each word.

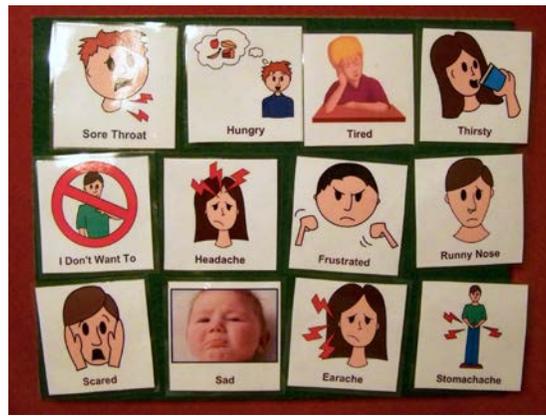
Now I can tell Jeremiah, "If you go to occupational therapy first, then we will go for a Slurpee." Works like a charm! And yes, there are pictures of Slurpees out there! It's also a good behavior motivator. For example, "If you get a good report from Miss Darlene today (Jerry's speech teacher), then we will go to the park."

Here are some "If/Then" card examples:

- School/Park
- Chores/Slurpee
- Good Behavior Report/Daddy Date

Be creative! You are the only one who knows best what motivates your child and what doesn't and where he or she struggles with behavior/patience issues. Create cards that best fit your child/scenarios.

Feelings



Some kids have difficulty telling others what they're feeling. I made a set of emotions cards for Jeremiah that we also use to help him learn about facial expressions, as reading them is often another difficulty for autistics. Lucette covered a piece of cardboard with felt for me to keep these pictures and words displayed on. Jeremiah only needs to point to what he's feeling when he's unable to tell me with his words.

Examples:

- Frustrated
- Stuffy Nose
- I don't want to!
- Sad
- Tired
- Happy
- Thirsty
- Headache
- Scared
- I want to talk to you.
- Earache
- Stomachache
- Sore Throat
- Hungry

Step-By-Step Directions/Instructions



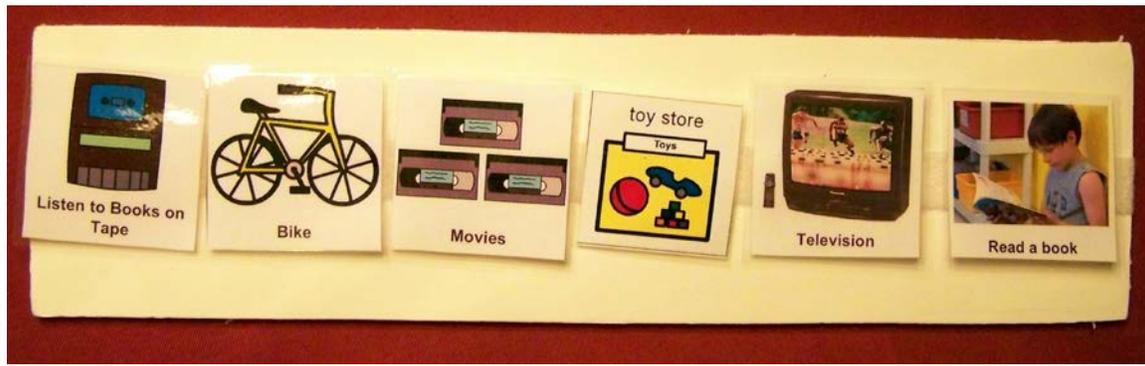
Using the foam board strips with the Velcro on them, I made some step-by-step cards for Jeremiah, as well as the special needs and preschoolers at our church (for their classrooms and bathrooms). Anything you want children to learn that requires them to be able to follow more than two or three steps can be taught with picture cards. Some examples might be hand-washing, tooth-brushing, wiping, putting pants on, tying shoes...the possibilities are limitless and again easy to tailor to your child's specific learning needs.

I made the tooth-brushing card for Jerry above and the cards I used for it included:

- Wet Toothbrush
- Get Toothpaste
- Put Toothpaste on Toothbrush
- Brush Teeth
- Rinse Mouth
- Spit Into Sink
- Rinse Toothbrush

You can include or exclude as many of these steps as necessary depending on your child's level of understanding and capability to follow multiple step directions. You can add steps I did not, such as "Turn Water On/Off" and "Wet Toothbrush". You can also remove cards one at a time as he/she remembers each step without a visual reminder.

Rewards



Another strip of cards I have is one of rewards. These can be for any age child and used as motivators for good behavior, completing assignments, patience, perseverance...whatever. For Jerry, I keep the reward cards on the foam board strip and, when he's earned one, let him look at the choices and choose the reward he desires. I have more cards than what you see on the strip, however, giving him too many choices frustrates him and so I choose the reward choices beforehand.

Here are some examples of rewards:

- Go to Party
- Sleepover
- Piece of Candy
- Extra Snack
- Computer Time
- Playground/Park
- Paint
- Daddy Date
- Video Game Time
- Play a Game
- Toy Store
- Movies
- Ride Bike
- Read a Book with Mom
- Play Catch/Bat
- TV Time
- Help Mom with Dinner
- Play Doh
- Bubbles
- Shaving Cream Fun

- Swimming
- Moon Sand
- Roller Skating

Behavior Management



This is one of our newest uses for the picture cards and I love it! I laminated a blank poster chart that I purchased at a local teacher supplies store. I put strips of Velcro down it and covered it with good behavior picture cards. Each morning, Jeremiah sees he's starting off his day with a clean slate and on a positive note. One of the cards might say, "I did not whine!" If Jeremiah does indeed whine, I take him to the board, talk to him about what he did that was not showing good behavior or was an act of disobedience, take the card off the board, and put it into the recycled baby wipes container.

Since Jeremiah cannot go ALL day without whining or any poor behavior (and what child can, really), we use this board in time increments of three hours. After each set of three hours, I put all of the cards that were removed back on the board and we start over. Otherwise, this would be frustrating for Jeremiah and an incredibly long day for both of us. Let's face it, sometimes we just wake up on the wrong side of the bed and take a while to snap out of it. How fair would it be to lose four or five picture cards in the first ten minutes of your day and know that it will be 24 hours before you get another chance to start over and make wiser choices in those areas?

I tried to keep the cards positive and not use the word "NO" on each card. And not all of the cards are behavior management cards.

Some represent tasks that I wish for Jeremiah to take the initiative to accomplish on his own, like getting dressed, brushing his teeth, and putting his shoes on when we're getting ready to go somewhere.

Also, after each three-hour time period, I reward Jeremiah for the remaining cards on the board and let him choose an activity from his rewards board. This gives him a feeling of some level of success and something to look forward to every few hours. It also makes me more accountable to spend much needed one-on-one time with him several times throughout the day, which can be difficult to schedule with three other kids, a house to clean, and my writing schedule.

You can break your rewards cards into your child's favorites or give him only specific cards to choose from depending on how well he did and how many cards he had left on the board during the three-hour time period. Then the consequences of misbehaving become not having the best or favorite activities to choose from.

Think about the behaviors you want to modify in your own child when creating your picture cards. You can create dozens and only choose to put the ones that are most pressing to work on up for a while. Once they seem to no longer be "problem areas" for your child, put them away and replace them with new behavior cards that you wish to be modified. Here are the picture cards I chose to print:

- I didn't tease anyone!
- I did well at OT!
- I did school!
- I shared!
- I didn't yell!
- I waited patiently!
- I helped!
- I took turns!
- I washed my hands!
- I ate all my food!
- I played nice with my friends!
- I didn't throw anything!
- I said no bad words!

- I didn't kick anyone or anything!
- I wore my helmet!
- I listened!
- I obeyed the first time!
- I didn't laugh at anyone!
- I was nice to the cat!
- I didn't whine!
- I cleaned up my toys!
- I didn't cry!
- I put my shoes on!
- I brushed my teeth!
- I got dressed!
- I made my bed!
- I used the potty!
- I didn't pick my nose!
- I got a good report from my teacher!
- I raised my hand!
- I did my chores!
- I didn't call names!
- I didn't hit!
- I didn't stick my tongue out at anyone!
- I did well at speech therapy!
- I behaved for the babysitter!
- I put my PJ's on!
- I took my medicine!
- I was respectful!
- I didn't talk back!
- I didn't complain!

By now you must envision a monster for my child, but again, I printed every and any card imaginable for behaviors that we have had to work on in the past, need to work on now, or may need to work on in the future. I do not use all of these cards at once!

Chores



We moved recently and, of course, with moving into a new or bigger house, you discover there are more or different chores that need to be done. Each of my kids has chores to do every week and this simple chore chart helps them remember to do them and gives them a sense of accomplishment when they have completed a task.

I put the kids' names at the top of a piece of foam board. I used a whole piece for this because I have four kids (and lots of chores). I made sure an even and ample amount of space was between each child's name. I put one long strip of Velcro under each name. On the strips I put picture cards of their chores for that day.

At the bottom of the foam board, I have Velcro'd a gallon-sized Ziploc bag. That's where I keep the unused chore picture cards. That's also where my kids put their cards once they have completed their chores and removed them from the strip under their name. At the end of the day, there is no question as to whether or not Michaela dusted the floorboards. If that picture card is still under her name, I know she didn't.

The kids love this visual. There is no unknown or miscommunication as to what's expected of them on any given day.

They need only look at the chart under their name. They take turns helping me make dinner/dessert as well and this lets them know whose turn it is each day. No fights! Imagine that! With this chart, I can also ensure that Michaela is not the only one dusting floorboards every week. One week it may be her turn, but then I can move the card to under Jonathan's name the next time the chore needs to be done. Nothing is written in stone (or typed on a chart in the computer only to have to be changed every month)!

I also printed some cards that said things like, "Way To Go!", "Good Job!", "Nice!", "Keep up the Good Work!", "I Love You!" I slip these on their chore chart every now and then at the end of each day for them to find the next morning. A little encouragement goes a long way!

Here are some of our chore cards:

- Dust
- Vacuum
- Mop
- Feed Cat
- Sweep Garage
- Empty Room Garbages
- Make Bed
- Clean Sinks
- Clean Toilets
- Clear Table
- Set Table
- Clean Windows/Mirrors
- Clean Bedroom
- Put Clothes Away
- Help with Laundry
- Take Garbage to the Curb
- Take Recycling Out
- Bring Garbage Can/Recycling Bins back into Garage from Curb
- Load Dishwasher
- Unload Dishwasher

Communication Cards



These are cards that I laminate, but do not Velcro. They are great little communication devices when talking out loud is not an option (and glaring and eye rolling is not effective). I carry a few in my church bag, some in my purse for the movies, car, or in line at the grocery store. They're simple visual reminders to Jerry that I'm watching him at all times. I just pull out a card, palm it, and flash it at him. You could also punch a hole in the corner of the cards and bind them with a key ring to make them easier to keep track of.

Here are a few examples:

- Sshhhh!
- Raise Your Hand
- Good Boy
- No
- Awesome Job
- OK
- Good Job
- I Love You

And yes, there are appropriate pictures to relay each of these messages for non-readers.

Educational Cards

I can't even begin to tell you of the possibilities of using picture cards for school. The obvious are homemade flash cards. There could be math facts, vocabulary cards, people of the Bible cards, pictures of relatives or emotions you want to familiarize your child with, picture cards that relay a story the child has read in pieces or chapters...you name it!

You could make your own cards for a memory game. Lucette's kids were working on a planets unit study and she made a memory game out of homemade planet cards. The kids had to give facts about the planet once they formed a match. *Genious!*

You could make your own sight word cards and card games, personalized just for your family or what your kids are learning in school.

You could make cards with the names of the states on them, give your child a blank map of the country, and then ask him to put each state's card in its proper place.

Truly, the way picture cards can be used is only as restricted as your imagination or creativity. Let your kids make some with the pictures and names of their favorite Webkinz or friends on them.

In closing, I do pray that I too, like Lucette, have created a monster as you now discover the limitless ways picture cards can be used to meet the needs of the learners in your family, be they visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. God bless you, happy laminating, and may the Velcro be with you!