

Power Cards: An Overview

Definition and Purpose	Power cards (Gagnon, 2001) are a form of visual support, which is an evidence-based practice for autistic students. Visual supports are defined as a “visual display that supports the learner in engaging in a desired behavior or skills independent of additional prompts” (Steinbrenner et al., 29). Power cards are used to teach and prompt academic, behavioral, organizational, and social skills to autistic students. Power cards are typically the size of an index card and include skills a student can use, while incorporating their focused interest. Since many students on the autism spectrum tend to have highly developed focused interests, this strategy is especially beneficial for this population. By incorporating their focused interest, the student is motivated to use the strategy presented in the scenario and on the power card.
When to Use Power Cards	Power cards are ideal to use with autistic students across a variety of social and academic situations to: » increase awareness of expectations, » clarify choices, » teach cause and effect between specific behaviors, » teach another’s perspective, or » aid in generalization as a visual reminder.
Why Use Power Cards	» Provide a concrete visual that autistic students can reference when faced with challenging situations » Serve as a reminder of coping strategies » Empower and motivate the student to make positive choices and navigate social interactions more successfully by using a character they admire
Critical Components of Power Cards	» Create a brief script of the situation being addressed that incorporates the student’s focused interest. » The script should be written at the student’s comprehension level and should include relevant pictures or graphics. » From the script, create the power card on an index card by placing a small picture of the student’s focused interest, brief/summary script, and the solution to the problem situation broken into three to five steps or strategies.

Power Card (PC) Example

[Strategies to go on PC example]

- » Use a grounding strategy.
- » Take a break to get a drink of water.
- » Ask for help.

[Special Character or Theme]

Harry Potter



Image by Ryan_Stekken from Pixabay

[Brief Script Describing Situation – placed on back side of power card]

Sometimes during Language Arts, Professor Magonigal assigns a writing assignment. This might make Harry feel overwhelmed and could make it hard for Harry to start the assignment. When Harry feels overwhelmed, he can try to use his grounding strategies to help him calm down. When Harry uses his grounding strategies, he looks for 5 things he can see, 4 things he can touch, 3 things he can hear, 2 things he can smell, and 1 thing he can taste. He can also take a break to get a drink of water or ask his teacher for help. When Harry uses these strategies, Harry may feel calmer to help him focus on his work. Professor Magonigal is proud of Harry when he uses strategies to help calm himself in the classroom.

PC Template

[Strategies to go on PC example]

**[Picture of special
character or theme]**

**[Brief script describing situation that can go on the back side of the
power card]**

Power Cards in Action

Assembly and Teaching Tips

- » Introduce the power card when the student appears to be well-regulated and ready to learn. Explain the purpose of the power card and how it can help the student in specific situations.
- » Customize the power card. Personalize the card by selecting a relevant skill and feature a character or role model that the individual identifies with or admires.
- » Teach the script. Review the script and model the desired skill or strategy.
- » Practice with the power card. Encourage the student to use the power card in relevant situations, providing prompts and reinforcement as needed.
- » Reinforce and generalize. Praise the student for using the power card effectively, and gradually fade support as they become more independent in applying the skill or strategy across different contexts.

Using Power Cards to Support Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)	A Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is a process for gathering, analyzing, and summarizing information about the relationship (i.e., function) between a person’s challenging behavior and their environment (Cooper, et al., 2019). An FBA provides specific information around how interventions should be individualized in consideration of a person’s skills, preferences, sensitivities, and environment. For students in schools, an FBA is conducted to address one or more of the following situations: » a change of placement to a more restrictive setting is considered due to a student’s behavior, » a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is removed from current placement for more than 10 school days for behavior determined to be a manifestation of their disability, » the IEP provides for the use of restraint or isolation, » a student’s behavior impedes learning for self or peers, » a student’s behavior threatens safety of self or others, » when determined appropriate by the student’s IEP team, » a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is considered ineffective by virtue of incomplete or flawed understanding of the student’s behavior, and/or » a student’s behavior limits student engagement, inclusion, and/or independence. An FBA may be conducted, as appropriate, in the following situations: » a student with an IEP is removed from current placement for more than 10 school days for behavior not determined to be a manifestation of their disability, or » a student with an IEP is removed to an interim alternative education setting for up to 45 school days for a zero-tolerance offense. Ultimately, a complete FBA will present one or more functional hypotheses supported by available evidence as to why behaviors of concern are occurring, along with an appraisal of student’s skill deficits that are impacting the behavior targeted within the FBA. The results of this FBA are used to individualize the Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). The BIP focuses on decreasing challenging behavior and increasing appropriate behavior (Cooper, et al., 2019). Power cards are a type of visual support that can be used as an antecedent strategy to help prevent the occurrences of challenging behavior by prompting the student to engage in a functionally equivalent replacement behavior. Once the student engages in the replacement behavior, they should receive reinforcement through a token system or other reinforcement system.
BIP and Antecedent (Prevention) Strategies	A BIP should include specific strategies or actions to set the student up for success and help prevent occurrences of challenging behavior. Antecedent strategies should be incorporated as part of a comprehensive BIP that

BIP and Antecedent (Prevention) Strategies <i>Continued</i>	includes the explicit teaching of a replacement behavior and reinforcement to increase the likelihood the student will engage in the replacement behavior. Below is an example of a power card description within a BIP.
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EXAMPLE DESCRIPTION WITHIN A BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLAN	
Intervention Description	Staff creates a power card with <coping strategies that match the behavioral function determined in the FBA>. When <student needs to engage in a coping strategy as determined by the FBA>, they use the power card to select a coping strategy. Five minutes before transitioning from homeroom to math class, the student will use their power card to choose and engage in a coping strategy. Immediately after the student completes the coping strategy, the educator will say, "Great job using your strategies! You've earned a token!" paired with providing a token for the student's token board.
Who will implement?	The educator
When will it occur? (e.g., time of day, days of week)	Prior to transitioning from homeroom to math class
When will the intervention begin?	11/10/24
Materials Needed	Power card

Learn More	View TRIAD resources and trainings at triad.vumc.org/schools . Visit the online learning portal to access the free Introduction to Visual Supports course. To access, first register for an account. If you already have an account, log in here .
References	» Gagnon, E. (2001). Power cards: Using special interests to motivate children and youth with Asperger syndrome and autism. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing. » Steinbrenner, J. R., Hume, K., Odom, S. L., Morin, K. L., Nowell, S. W., Tomaszewski, B., Szendrey, S., McIntyre, N. S., Yücesoy-Özkan, S., & Savage, M. N. (2020). Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with Autism. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice Review Team. https://ncaep.fpg.unc.edu/sites/ncaep.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/documents/EBP%20Report%202020.pdf » Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2019). <i>Applied Behavior Analysis (3rd Edition)</i>. Hoboken, NJ: Pearson Education.