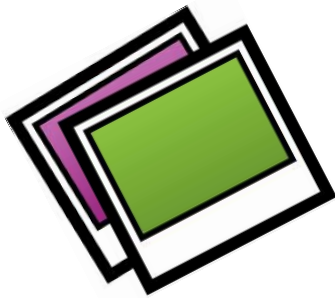


Using Visuals to Support Communication



Overview

This tool was developed by NCSE Speech and Language Therapists. It has been developed for use by teachers working with children with additional needs as part of Summer Provision.

This document provides advice for teachers on the use of visuals to support pupils' communication. There are top tips for using visuals included as well as ideas on how to use visuals to enhance communicative opportunities.

This resource supports the key principles of 'promoting a sense of safety', 'promoting a sense of calm', 'promoting a sense of self-efficacy and community efficacy' and 'promoting connectedness'.

What are visual supports?

A visual support refers to using a visual item, such as an object, photograph, sign or picture, to communicate. Visual supports aid and enhance communication. They provide children and adults with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) with an alternative mode of communication.

Visuals can help to provide structure and routine, improve understanding, avoid frustration and offer opportunities to interact with others.

Visuals are not only useful for people with SLCN. We all rely on visuals to support us in our everyday life e.g. calendars, diaries, signs. Visuals promote inclusion, as they are helpful for everyone!

There are a number of types of visual supports and children do not understand all types straight away. Children's understanding of visuals develops in the following order:

1. Real Objects
2. Small World Objects
3. Photographs
4. Pictures/Symbols
5. Black and White Line Drawings
6. Words
7. Phrases
8. Sentences

For a visual to be effective, it is important to think about **why** a child needs them and **what type** of visual needs to be in place.

Why use visual supports?

'Visuals stay, words
fly away...'

Visuals are
permanent

Visuals help us with
changes and
transitions

Visuals can move
between people and
environments

Visuals help to build
independence

Visuals allow
children to share
information

Visuals help children
to make choices and
express their wants
and needs

Visuals provide
structure for
children who need it

Visuals help ALL
children

Top Tips for Using Visuals

- 👍 **Introduce the visual** to the pupil and explain what you are going to be using it for
- 👍 Think about **when and where you will be using the visual**. In what activities/situations would it be most useful
- 👍 If you are **using objects** they need to be meaningful and motivating for the pupil. You can start to use photos/pictures alongside the object to support the child to transition from object to picture recognition
- 👍 **Be consistent** in your use of visuals:
 - children need to see visuals lots of times to begin to understand their use
 - use the same visual for the same thing
- 👍 **Where is the visual?** Make sure the visuals are clearly visible for the pupil
- 👍 Make them **accessible** for everyone supporting the pupil e.g. have a specific area for keeping objects/symbols and make sure everyone knows where it is, or if using a tablet device put a short cut on the home screen

Ideas for how you can Use Visuals to Support Communication

Starting/Finishing Activities

For some pupils, it is important to know when activities are starting and even more importantly, when they are finishing. This will reduce confusion and support their understanding.



There are lots of different visual supports you can use, depending on a pupil's current understanding, you could have an object signifier, or a sign, or a picture. For example to indicate when something is starting if a pupil is currently using objects you could use a stopwatch, or at picture level a 'Go' sign.

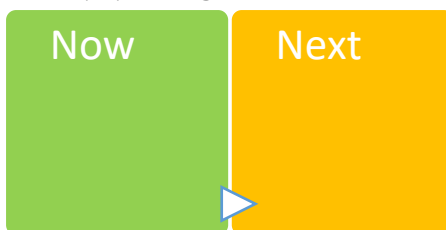


Use the visual with the pupil, and ensure that when the activity is finished, the object or symbol is no longer be visible, as the pupil should associate it with finishing only.

Sequencing

Use a visual timetable to support the pupil to structure their day.

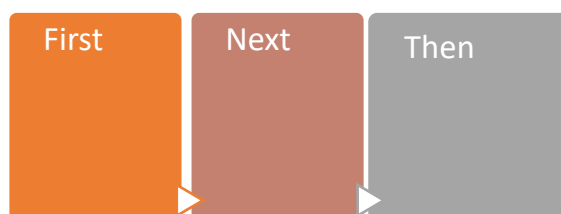
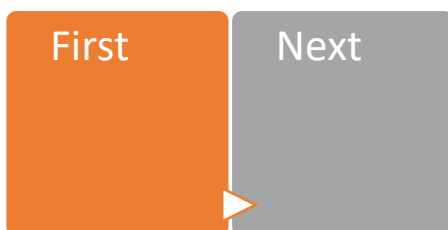
Some pupils might find it easier to only follow two or three parts of a routine e.g. you



could make a 'now and next' board, and have a visual to indicate what is 'now' and what is 'next'. It is often useful to have the 'next' activity as something motivating for the pupil, this encourages them to do

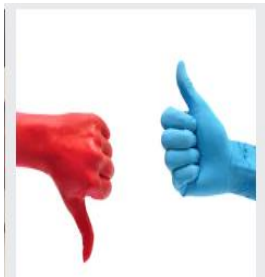
an activity of your choosing first.

Alternatives to this include 'First - Next' boards, which can be expanded to 'First - Next - Then' boards.



Choices

Some pupils need support to make choices and visual supports can help them to choose food, activities etc. Choices promote independence and involve pupils in the decision making process.



Opinions

Pupils can be supported to use visuals to express their opinions. You could make 'like' and 'don't like' symbols/objects/photos and ask the pupil to place them beside the object/activity that you are seeking their opinion on. You can also use gesture e.g. thumbs up, thumbs down.

Emotions

Visual supports can help pupils to express their emotions and tell people how they are feeling. You could draw happy/sad/scared faces, or use photographs, and support the pupil to identify how they are feeling.



Supporting transitions or changes

There are lots of changes happening at the moment and pupils are out of their normal routine. The use of visuals can prepare pupils for changes and help them to understand that there is a change. The use of 'Social Stories' can also support pupil's understanding of transitions, it may be useful to prepare a story for pupils transitioning back to school, using photographs of the school or classroom to support the pupil's understanding. For further information on how to write a social story see: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

Developing Independence in Routines

Help the pupil to develop independence in familiar self-care routines through the use of pictures or objects to signify each step e.g. handwashing routine, toileting routine, putting coat/shoes on. Using visuals to break up the routine helps pupils to learn the sequence of the routine and sustain attention. For some pupils, having visuals to show them what will happen next reduces stress and anxiety as it adds predictability to the task.



Use the visual schedule to help pupils follow the steps necessary to successfully complete a self-care task. You may wish to include photos of the actual materials pupils use, in order to better help him/her understand each step.



Example of washing hands schedule (place at eye level for pupil at sink)

Example of putting on coat schedule (place next mirror/in area where pupil put on coat):



Visuals for self-care activities are available to print off online at:

<http://life-skills.middletownautism.com/strategies/self-care-activities/personal-hygiene/>