

Visual Support

People with Autism have strengths and differences in the way they learn. For many, verbal input, such as speech, is one of the most challenging modalities, while visual information may often be more easily understood.

Visual supports can be used to help people with Autism; they are portable, adaptable, can be personalised, and can be used in many situations.

Many people with Autism are thought to be visual learners, so presenting information in a visual way can help to support and encourage the ability to process information, communication and language development. It can also promote independence, self-confidence and raise self-esteem.

When using visual support it is important to ensure they are appropriate to the individual and in line with their needs and current stage of development. Visual supports are very personal and what works for one person may not work for another. Once you introduce a type of visual support (for example, timetable, schedule, cue cards), use it consistently so that the person becomes used to it.

Visual Timetables and schedules

Timetables and schedules are a good way of helping to provide structure and routine. They can help people with Autism to understand and begin to predict what is expected of them and what will happen next. Visual timetables can also help to reduce anxiety and help individuals to cope with change and transition. When first introducing a timetable it is important to include only activities that the person is interested in and motivated by and, where possible, following the natural rhythm of activities the person would choose to engage in. Thus encouraging the person to engage with the system in a positive way. Later, once the person has learned the visual system and is able to follow the timetable/schedule less preferred activities can be included. It is good practice to follow less preferred activities by a preferred activity.

Start with a simple vertical two stage timetable you can add to this over time to gradually work towards a morning/ afternoon timetable.

Travelling Timetable

Travelling Timetables can be made using an opaque plastic wallet or a piece of paper could be inserted into a clear wallet so that finished activities can no longer be seen.

The wallet has a plastic strip with hard a Velcro strip attached.

It also has the Finished symbol on the back

Symbols representing activities are then attached to this with soft Velcro.

The child takes the symbol from the wallet front and goes to the activity.

They then stick the symbol on the corresponding environmental sign.

When the activity is complete they remove the symbol from the area and post it in the folder-wallet as Finished.

The child looks to the timetable for the next activity and repeats.

The child may need physical hand over hand prompting initially. Try to keep the use of language to a minimum and always use the word on the symbol. The long term aim is independence so the adult should remain mindful of opportunities to reduce prompting and promote independence

For example "Name, water" move to the water area and guide the child to stick on the symbol.

Point to the area sign say "water". When the activity is finished say "water finished" guide the child to put the symbol in the folder point to the 'Finished' symbol and repeat "finished"

Look to the next symbol "Name, sand" and repeat.

Include lots of motivating activities and gradually introduce less preferred activities. This allows the child to understand that a less motivating activity will finish and that a motivating activity is coming soon.

Do not worry if the child is unwilling to stay for long in a non- preferred activity even a fleeting visit is a positive step.

If the child is reluctant to move to the activity indicated on their timetable, bring the activity to them. The adult can play with the activity alongside the child providing an opportunity for the child to join in (however fleetingly). The child should then be encouraged to put the symbol in the 'finished' wallet as usual.

Static Timetable

When a child is familiar with and confidently using a Travelling Timetable it may be possible to graduate to a Static Timetable.

This should use the same symbols as before and be supported with the same Environmental signage.

Static Timetables can be made using a laminated A4 piece of paper.

You can add a picture of the child to the top of the timetable to personalise it.

Stick a hard strip of Velcro vertically down the centre of the board.

Attach the opaque wallet with the 'Finished' symbol to the bottom of the board.

When finding the right location for the Static Timetable make sure that you consider its height and accessibility and position it in a quieter low arousal area of the classroom if possible.

Introduce the child to the Timetable showing them where it is and their picture.

Look at the first symbol on the Timetable together and support the child to remove the symbol from the timetable and match it to the area of the classroom, again using minimal prompting (“Name, water”).

When the activity is finished support them to go back to the timetable and post the symbol in the ‘Finished’ wallet and repeat.

As with the Travelling Timetable start with two preferred activities gradually introduce other less motivating activities. As the child becomes more confident you can add more symbols working towards a Morning/Afternoon timetable.

In this way the child can independently refer to their Morning Timetable and prepare themselves for the daily routine. This will provide a predictable structure for the day and help to alleviate the child’s anxiety around change and the unknown.

The child may initially need support in moving to a Static Timetable, however as they become more confident with this you can reduce the level of your support. The aim is for the child to independently access their timetable to move between activities. This may be a slow process and may not always be possible so the level of adult support will be dependant on the individual child needs.

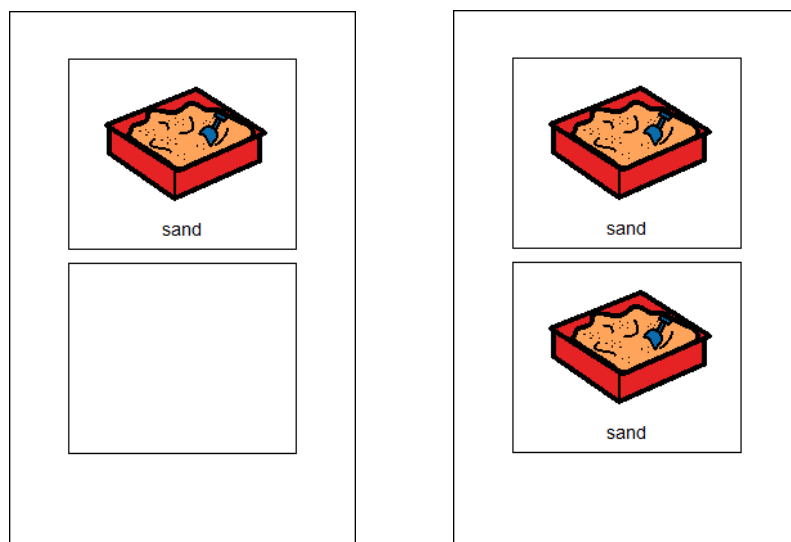
Environmental Signage

Environmental Signage is used to label individual areas and teach children that symbols on their timetable relate to individual areas. It must be in all areas of the setting that the child can access including outside areas.

For example:

The adult physically prompts the child to take off the symbol from their timetable and Velcro it to the blank square on the environmental signage:

When this activity has finished the adult prompts the child to remove the symbol and put it inside the zip wallet



Objects of Reference

Objects of Reference can be used as a pre cursor to the visual timetables above and may be used with children who have difficulties in processing generic visual symbols.

In the same way as Visual Timetables the use of Objects of Reference allows the child to see what's going to happen and help them to understand what's being said.

The objects of reference are linked with a photographic representations of the objects used by that child. A photo is attached to the object clearly labelled to enable consistency of language. The same photo should be placed at each area of the setting so that the child can link the photo on their timetable to the area of provision and match the object to the correct area. This is using the same concept that we use when creating visual based Environmental Signs.

E.g. The spade represents sand. We take a picture of the sand tray with the spade in it. We add the word Sand to the photo. We attach this picture to the spade and an exact copy to the sand area.

An Object of Reference Timetable allows the child to see what is happening next and helps them to understand what is being said to them in the same way as a Visual Timetable.

When deciding on how to present the Object of Reference timetable it may be helpful to consider the accessibility for staff (to ensure consistent use), the demands of space in the setting, how to restrict pupil access to items (to ensure they do not become part of the settings provision), and the choice of objects used.

It is important that the child sees a clear link between the object and activity so use objects that represent frequently recurring activities and events.

Before taking a photo of the provision remove any resources except for the chosen object of reference.

E.g.

Take a photo of the sand tray with the spade (and only the spade) in the tray this can now be paired with the spade as the Object of Reference

Take a photo of the lunch table with a picture of the child's plate (and no other items) on it this can now be paired with the plate as the Object of Reference

There are many ways you could present an Objects of Reference Timetable these are two examples

- Static Washing Line Timetable

Attach hooks or pegs on to the objects of reference chosen. Hang them on a washing line working from Left to Right showing the sequence of the day.

Place this in front of a clear area of display wall preferably in a neutral colour.

As you move through the routine of the day remove the item from the line read the word and give it to the child. Point at the photo and repeat the word. Now move to that area.

Place the object beside the corresponding photo if possible attaching it to the area with Velcro. Repeat the word pointing at the environmental photo.

E.g -Give the spade to the child. Say "Sam, sand" point to the photo say "Sam, sand" go to the area fix the spade to the Sand Area beside the photo of the area point at the picture on the sand tray, say "sand"

When the activity is finished you return to the washing line and hang the object up removing the next item and repeat.

- Travelling Object of Reference Timetable

Use a large piece of felt or other hardwearing thick material which is able to be rolled up and carried.

Choose your objects and attach the labelled picture to the object.

Attach a hard Velcro strip across the material. Add soft Velcro pieces to the Object of Reference and stick to the fabric.

As you move through the routine of the day remove the item from the material read the word and give it to the child. Point at the photo and repeat the word. Now move to that area.

Place the object beside the corresponding photo if possible attaching it to the area with Velcro. Repeat the word pointing at the environmental photo.

E.g Give the spade to the child say "Sam, sand" point to the photo say "Sam, Sand" go to the area fix the spade to the Sand Area beside the photo of the area say "sand"

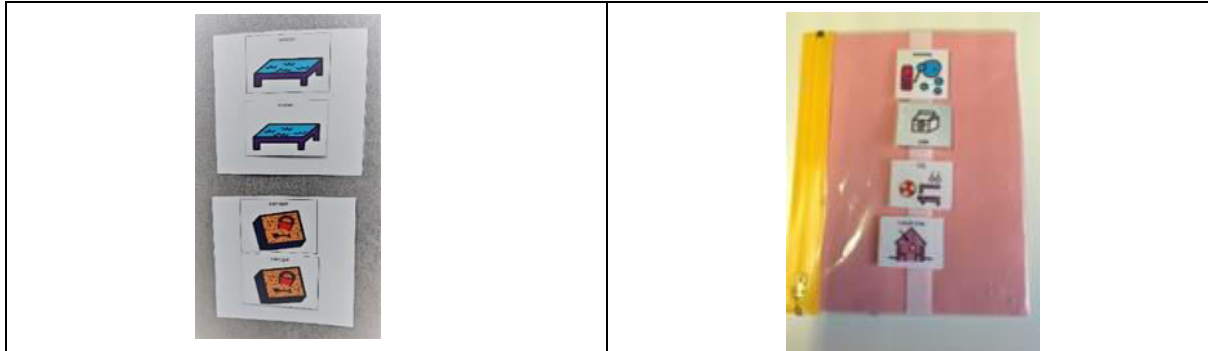
When the activity is finished you return the item to the material timetable removing the next item and repeat.

It is important to bring the child's attention to the photo in each case to establish the link between the object and picture to support the child in making that link. One of the aims of this process is to be able to use this as a stepping stone towards the use of a photographic/symbol based timetable in the future. In some cases this may not be possible and the

Objects of Reference system can be used as a method of communication to ask for activities and make choices as in the case of visuals, and to promote the child's independence.

Example of an Environmental sign

Example of a Simple Travelling Timetable



Example of a Static Timetable

Example of Objects of Reference

