Visual strategies

Visual strategies are often used to support children who learn in a very visual way. A range of strategies can be used for varying activities such as making choices, schedules/timetables or making requests.

Visual learners find pictures, objects or printed words helpful as they are static. The child will continue to receive the information presented for as long as they are looking at it, unlike spoken words which disappear immediately.

Visual helpers are used to help children understand what is going on around them and to express themselves.

Visual helpers can be:

- Objects: If your child does not yet understand pictures or photographs, using real objects will be beneficial. E.g. at drink time a cup is used to explain what is going to happen. If the real objects are too big, smaller versions or toys can be used such as a toy swing if going to the park. Sometimes however this can be confusing and a picture might be more useful.

- Photographs: If your child is interested in photos, make the most of this to support their understanding. You can buy pictures of familiar items or use a camera to take photos of everyday items.

- Line drawings: Line drawings don't look exactly like the real thing and can be used generally e.g. one picture to represent t-shirts, as opposed to a photo of a specific t-shirt.
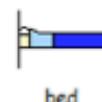
Visual helpers can be used in a variety of ways and can incorporate objects, photographs or line drawings:

- Understand and make choices: Choice boards can be used to present a specific choice to your child. The number of choices on the board depends on the number of choices available and the child's ability to choose. It is important to only have the picture available if it is a possibility. Choices can be made physically (pointing) or verbally (asking for an item).

- No signs: These can be used when an activity is not available or to discourage unwanted behaviour.
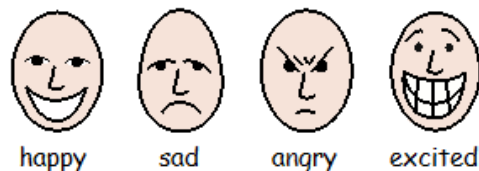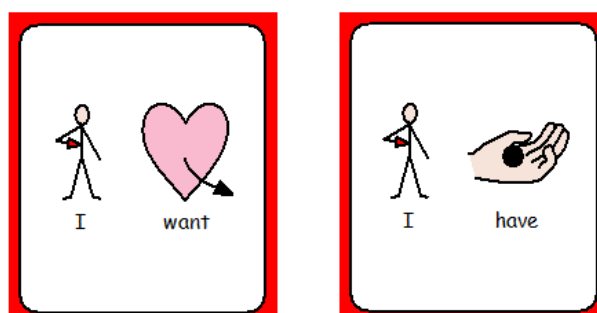
bed

no   park

no kicking

- Understand what is going to happen: Using a picture schedule can help your child better understand and anticipate events throughout the day. These can range from 2 pictures to represent 2 activities to all activities that will happen that day. Pictures are used to represent each activity and place on a board in the order they will happen. Once an activity has finished that pictures is removed.
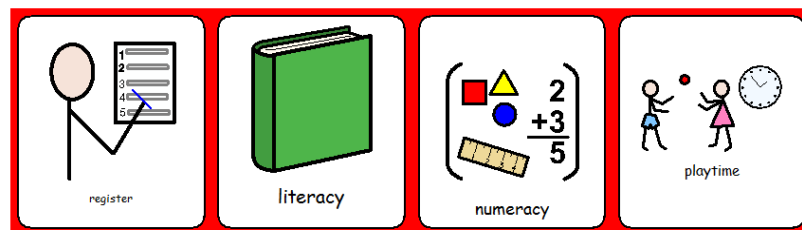
- Be more independent: When a child is successfully using visual helpers, they may be less reliant on adults to instruct them on routines such as washing hands or getting dressed. If they know where they have to go and what they have to do when they get there, your child will be more independent.

- Understand and express feelings: Your child may not be able to recognise facial expressions used by other people or understand the words 'happy' 'sad' etc. But if you show him pictures representing these emotions, they have more time to understand what you're talking about.

- Make requests or comments: If your child's speech is slow to develop, pictures can be used to make requests. The child can exchange a picture or object for the item they want. This is a clearer way for your child to communicate than pulling or leading.

- Reminders of what to say: Cue cards can be used as reminders of what to say in different situations. E.g. cue cards can say 'I want…' 'I have…'.

Visual Timetables

Using a picture schedule can help your child better understand and anticipate events throughout the day.

They can range from short schedules with 2 activities or can cover the whole day.

- 'First' and 'Then'

These schedules are used to explain what is going to happen in the immediate future and what will happen next. E.g. First work, then play, or first dinner, then sweets.
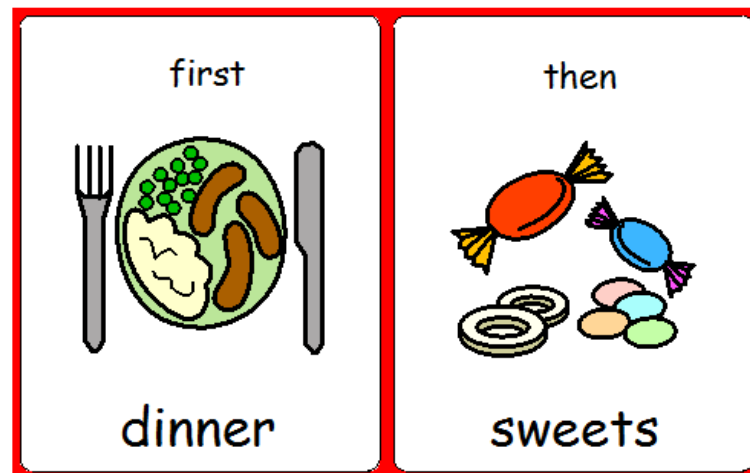
These can be used if your child does not respond well to being told to wait or told they can't have something, explaining that they can have a reward after doing the desired task. Using a visual helper will help them to understand and therefore focus on the activity.

- Specific activities

Visual schedules can be used to break down one activity into smaller tasks e.g. getting dressed.
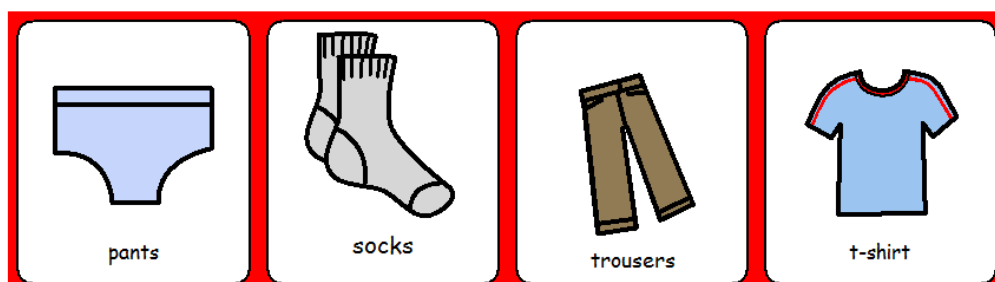
- Full schedules

Picture or object schedules can be used for different amounts of time. Some children can only cope with a schedule of the morning, with the afternoon schedule presented later. Some children however like to know what is going to happen over the whole day.

register	literacy	numeracy	dinner	swimming	home

Different timetables can be used for the morning routine at home, the school/nursery day and then the evening routine at home.

These pictures are usually separate from the board and stuck on each day, allowing the timetables to changed depending on the routine. Once an activity is completed the picture can be taken off the board and put in a finished box.

Creating Timetables:

Materials
- Board – Picture
- Pictures – Picture
- Blue tack or Velcro
- Finished box

Choice of timetable:

When choosing which type of timetable to use it is important to consider how much information your child can cope with. If they are quite young it may be better to use shorter timetables such as morning and afternoons.

If your child has difficulty understanding what is expected of them in particular situations (e.g. to eat dinner before their sweets), a 'first and then' schedule may be useful.

Choosing the pictures:

- Photographs: If your child is interested in photographs, these can be used in the timetables. Photographs can give specific and realistic information about each activity. Try to use photographs of the actual equipment/activity your child will be using, for example take a photograph of the park you visit regularly, try not to use a general photograph of any park.

computer

- Line Drawings: These are useful if your child has difficulty processing lots of visual information as the pictures are simple. They are also more general, allowing for a certain amount of freedom. These picture symbols may be available from

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computer

nursery/school or you can use clipart. Some symbols are available online from websites such as www.do2learn.com

Putting the timetable together:

Once you have chosen which type of timetable you want to use, you can create the board.
- Choose the size of card/paper that is necessary for the type of timetable. There needs to be enough space for all the pictures.
- Laminate to make it longer lasting

Make the pictures
- Take photographs of toys or areas that represent each activity, e.g. the computer or your child's bed.
- Ensure the photographs are big enough to be clear, but small enough to fit onto the board.
- Print the photos and cut them out (these can also be laminated). To attach them to the board you can use blue tack or Velcro.

Using the timetable:

- Before each session decide what activities are going to happen. E.g. morning routine, - get dressed – have breakfast – brush teeth – brush hair – get coat and bag – leave for nursery.
- Place these pictures in the order they will happen on the board. This can be done yourself or with your child. Talk through with your child what is going to happen in that time.
- When each stage is complete remove the picture and place it in the finished box.
- Set the timetable up for next time e.g. coming home from nursery.

<u>Hints and tips</u>

- When taking pictures, zoom in on object so there is no unnecessary information'
- Only take picture of toy/object, not child playing with toy.
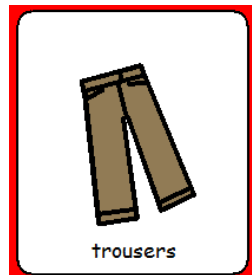- Take photographs of the actual objects/places your child will be using/visiting.

- Realistic pictures can be created by using the packaging from food or toys directly.

- Place the timetable in an easy to reach place that your child will see often.

- Adding the printed word to the picture can help your child to see the connection between pictures and printed words.

- When talking through the timetable use clear and simple language. Use familiar words such as 'first' 'next' 'then' 'finished'.
- You may need to draw attention to the pictures initially, use your finger to point to each one, or help your child to point.

- Always stick to the timetable for each session. The timetable can be changed each time you use it and is a good way to introduce changes.
- Don't put anything on the timetable that can't happen, the child has to learn to trust it.
- A reward on a timetable is a promise, not dependant on behaviour. For example if the timetable says your child can play with Thomas after numeracy and literacy, time must be made available for this, even if they have misbehaved in previous activities.
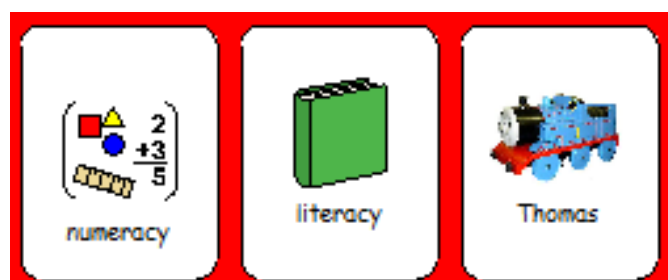
A separate reward system can be used to manage behaviour, e.g. sticker charts, so your child will only receive a sticker if they are well behaved.