

Module 5

Visual supports

A visual support is something that you can see that helps an autistic person understand or inform. Seeing it, helps the person retain and process information.

"Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-colour movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head". Temple Grandin-Autistic adult

Everybody uses visual supports.

Just think about when you go to the airport. The visual supports help to create order out of the chaos of the place.

Think about flat pack furniture. There are lots of bits that need to be assembled, the instructions show you how exactly to do it. Think about your diary. It reminds you what you are doing on what day and the time that it will happen.

Visual supports tilt the seesaw. Whenever you perceive a situation may be on the uncertain side of the seesaw, then use visual supports to help give information and understanding. In this way reducing anxiety.

9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS

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- 1. VISUALS ARE PERMANENT (SPOKEN WORDS DISAPPEAR)
- 2. VISUALS ALLOW TIME FOR LANGUAGE PROCESSING
- 3. VISUALS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR TRANSITIONS
- 4. VISUALS HELP KIDS SEE WHAT YOU MEAN
- 5. VISUALS HELP ALL STUDENTS
- 6. VISUALS HELP BUILD INDEPENDENCE
- 7. VISUALS ARE TRANSFERABLE BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE
- 8. VISUALS HAVE NO ATTITUDE (NO TONE, NO FRUSTRATION, NO DISAPPROVAL)
- 9. VISUALS HELP REDUCE ANXIETY

Kristin Wiens 2017

Individualise the Visual Support

A person may respond to different visual supports. See the following table for examples.

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Objects of reference | A nappy to show it is toilet time. A lunch box to show it is lunchtime. A ball to show it is time go outside. |
| Remnants | Empty packet wrappers, tickets from events, glossy brochures, advertising material |
| Photographs | Actual photos or images from the internet, or images captures on your mobile phone or other technology device |
| Symbols | Black and white symbols produced on computer programmes, available on some websites free |
| Drawings | Line drawings that you produce yourself |
| Written Word | Written lists, instructions, signs |
| Technology | Smart phones, tablets |

Individualising means providing the right level of visual support and getting the message across so the person understands.

Individualising means looking at the situation you are going to introduce visual supports to and working out what would be needed.

[Visual Supports](#)






How can visual supports be used?

With visual supports you can:

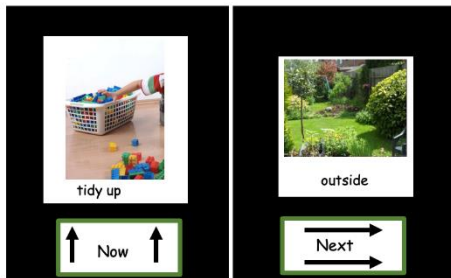
Create a daily schedule/visual block of time

A visual schedule can support understanding of routine and knowing when it is time to transition. A visual schedule will support understanding of what to expect, will happen next, when their routine changes or they are in unfamiliar situations. Here are some examples of visuals to use at transition time:

| | |
|--|--|
|  | <p>A Talking Tile/Tin is used to tell a child that whatever they are doing is going to finish and they are moving to a different location. A nursery rhyme or a favourite song is recorded on the talking tile, when this is played this lets the child know it is time</p> |
|   | <p>Object Cues represents activities and are given to a child to tell them what they are going to do next. Support your child to place the object in a 'finished box' in the activity is finished. Show the next object to support understanding of where to go next. Sometimes it is helpful for your child to keep hold of the object as they move to the activity.</p> |



A **Photo Key Ring** is used to direct children to activities. This can be worn by the adult on a lanyard.



A **Now and Next board** can be used with those children who can just cope with understanding what they are doing now followed by the next activity or motivational activity.

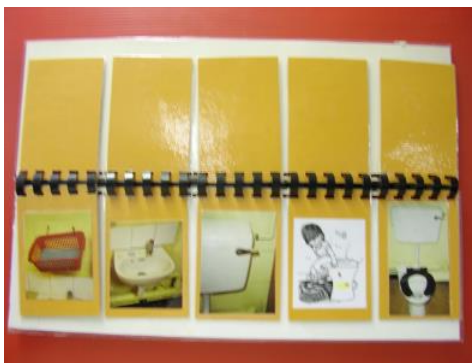


A **Static Visual Timetable/Schedule** working from top to bottom or from left to right using photos/symbols/or real objects stuck on a static schedule using Velcro.



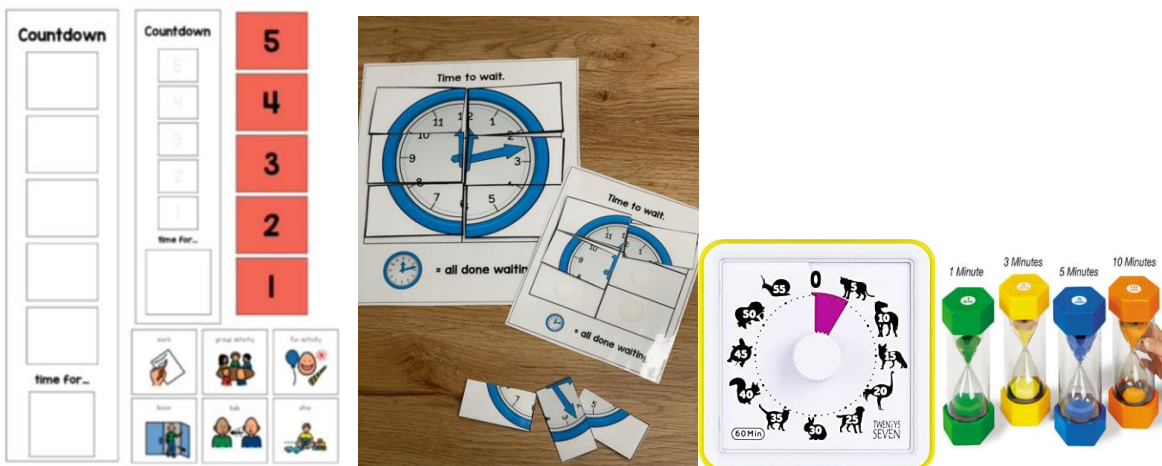
Show sequential steps in a task such as washing hands or getting dressed

Some everyday tasks or activities are complicated or need to happen in a sequence. You can help autistic children develop the skills for doing everyday tasks by breaking down tasks into small steps and using visuals to show the breakdown of the task. In these examples, each picture can be covered as the child completes each step of the process. When all are covered it is visually clear that the process has finished.



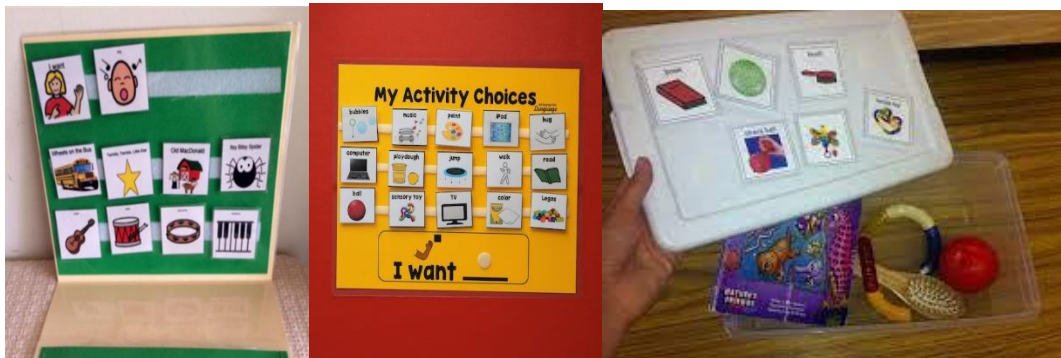
Make time visual and show time is passing

The concept of time passing and to 'wait' is difficult for any child to understand. For an autistic child, uncertainty about when and how long to do things can cause unnecessary anxiety. Knowing how long an activity will last gives you reassurance and helps the child finish one activity and transition easily to the next. Using a visual timer helps make time a more tangible concept.



Aid communication by offering choice boards or a choice box

Choice boards and choosing boxes are useful ways to represent options to children. They can be used to show a range of options in a lesson sequence, or the choices for filler activities or rewards. The child uses them by removing the preferred option from the board or box and hands the chosen card to the adult.



Can I make my own visual supports?

Some of these programs tend to be expensive and not always affordable. An alternative to buying a pre-packaged product is to make your own visuals. You can achieve this in several ways:

- By taking photos with a digital camera
- Cutting out pictures from print media such as magazines or old calendars
- Dollar stores can be a great place to find inexpensive visuals if using objects.

A note of caution when taking photos – be sure to keep the background at a minimum and make the focal point the subject of the photo. If you take photos from too far away, the background tends to get busy looking and can become the focal point the autistic person.

Here are some excellent websites for visuals:

www.do2learn.com

www.twinkl.co.nz

www.pictoselector.eu/

What is the best way to use Visual Supports

Your child may not understand a picture/symbol so it is always best to start with matching an object to object, then object to picture, then picture to picture. You can begin with using the actual object matching to the same object. Once that is mastered, then match an object to a picture. This helps the child understand that a picture can be a representation of an object.

Top tips for using visuals supports

- Always use the written word with all visual supports as no one can predict when understanding/comprehension of the written word will begin. Reading is a gradual process that involves years of skill building so it's important to provide as much exposure to the printed word as possible. It also allows the adults supporting the child to use the correct name for each visual.
- Take small steps to implement one visual at a time so that everyone involved does not experience the feeling of being overwhelmed.
- Inform everyone on your team about the new visual and exactly how you will be using it. How will you introduce it? What words will you use when teaching it to the child? What happens if the child is upset at first? These are things you should discuss in order to provide consistency within your team.
- It can take several weeks of implementing a new visual before it shows signs of 'working'. It is important to give it enough time, at least 3-4 weeks of consistent implementation before talking about whether it is working or not.

Video references

Links to short videos from Autism Association of Western Australia

- Supporting Communication-visual supports <https://youtu.be/N4nATOIagM4>
- Communication tips and strategies-visual supports <https://youtu.be/HM3o0NTSSbA>

Activity:

Next week we will be discussing how we best support our whanau/parents/carers. During the week reflect on how you support your families with autistic children in your centre. Please come with ideas, suggestions, examples and stories of how you do this.