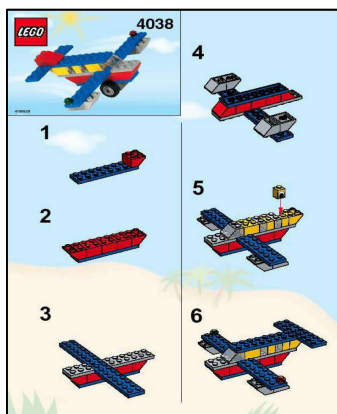


Module 2: Visual Supports

Everybody uses visual supports; they are universal design and will be helpful for all the children in your class.

Just think about when you go to the airport. A visual support helps to create order out of a chaotic and busy place. We will frequently look at our boarding pass to make sure we have the correct information. It is much easier to have it written down rather than trying to remember information in a stressful situation.



Think about flat pack furniture. There are lots of bits that need to be assembled; the instructions show you how to do it.

LEGO™ are brilliant at using visual instructions. They show you what it looks like when it is finished and the steps to achieve that, step by step.

Think about your diary, or mobile phone. It reminds you of what you are doing on what day and the time that it will happen.

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

Spoken words are usually the language of instruction in the classroom. But for an autistic student, words alone may not be enough for them to understand what is happening.

There are many reasons why words might not be enough. For example, some autistic people:

- Do not hear words when not directly addressed.
- Only hear the start or end of a spoken message.
- May understand only some of the words and not the vital ones, (prepositions such as 'before' and 'after' can be especially tricky).
- Do not understand the tone of voice that everyone else understands.
- Using too many words may overwhelm the student's ability to process information.
- Cannot generalise the meaning of one word.

- Take a literal understanding of words, so do not respond appropriately.

Research indicates that using visual supports is one of the most effective interventions for a student with autism. They are certainly one of the most easily implemented compensation strategies.

Visual Supports are;

What Visual Supports Are



Something that you see that remains there after the word has gone



Supports the student in their understanding

They are positive



Real objects, photos, line drawings, written word, apps

Spoken language is fleeting, but visual timetables and lesson plans are there when the words are not. When a student does not hear what the teacher said, they still have their visual timetable and lesson plans to guide them.

Visual timetables and lesson plans can provide the organisation, structure, and predictability that are so essential to autistic students. Without such supports, they may find the school world highly unpredictable and confusing.

Worth noting!! Just because a visual is placed in front of a student, it doesn't ensure 'compliance'.

Supporting learning

Visual lesson plans have been shown to increase engagement and therefore increase learning time. Try to link any visual to the child's special interests.

Independence

Visual timetables and lesson plans support independence by removing the need for the student to keep asking others what to do next. This reduces their 'prompt dependence' - removing the need for a teacher or support person to be on hand to verbally prompt the student about each new task or event.

Self-esteem and flexibility

As a student removes items from a visual lesson schedule or ticks a checklist to indicate task completion, they can see their progress through the day. This visual representation of accomplishment helps to build a sense of success and so improves their self-esteem.



The visual supports provide a means for the student to anticipate upcoming events; visual schedules may help to ease the student through transitions. They are a means of reducing repetitive actions. In fact, they promote adaptability.

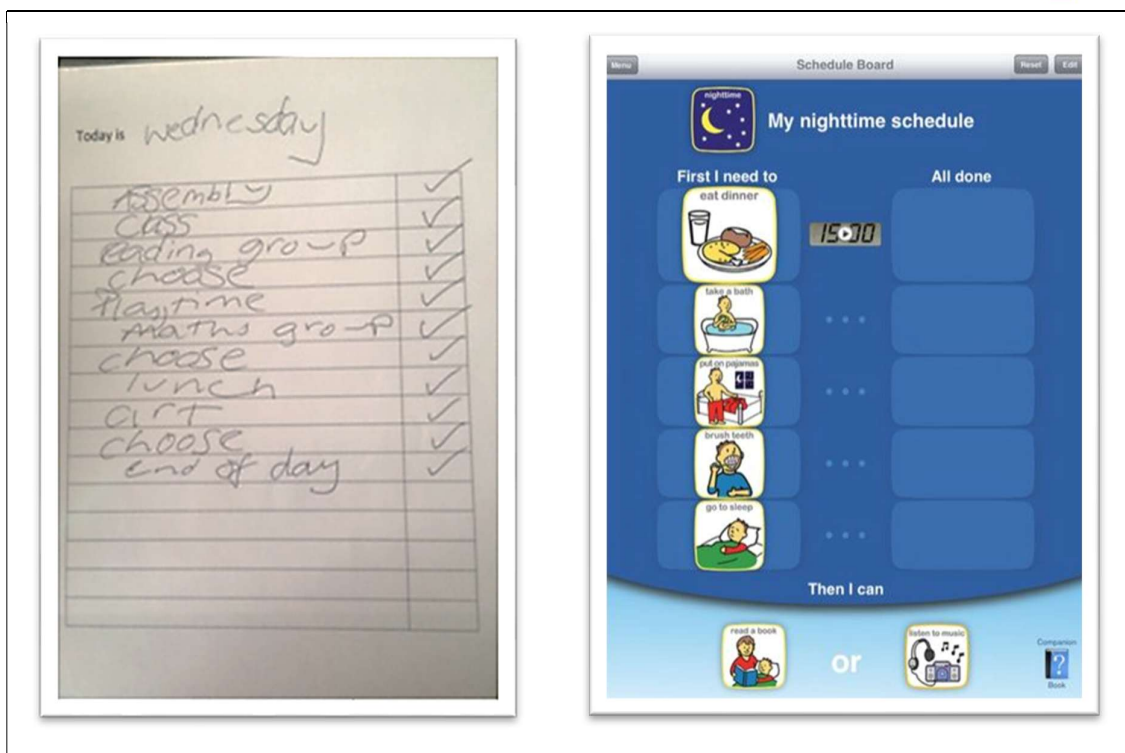
Visual schedules provide a means for the teacher to systematically introduce change into a student's daily routine without causing anxiety.

Self-Regulation

Creating their own daily visual timetables allows the student to schedule breaks and relaxing activities on their own initiative, and at the times they need them. In other words, the timetable empowers the student to take charge of their own self-regulation.

Visual schedules remind the student that a preferred activity is coming up soon after finishing a non-preferred task. This helps reduce anxiety and prevent 'meltdowns'.

Preparing their own schedule daily gives the student a sense of autonomy and control over the often-confusing demands of their day.



Benefits for all

Picture schedules and checklist/rub-off timetables work so well that other students may also benefit, especially when schedules are displayed where others in the classroom can see them.

Autistic students often find it easier to understand what is happening during lessons and the school day when they are explained visually. This tilts their seesaw towards the 'certain' side, making them less anxious and increases their ability to learn.

Individualise the Visual Support

A person may respond to different visual supports. There is no right way or wrong way to present visual information. What works for one student may not work for another. Some students enjoy or are motivated by being involved with the creation of visual supports. See the following table for examples.

Object	For example, if you hold up a toothbrush and say "time to do your teeth"
Remnants	Empty packet wrappers, tickets from events, glossy brochures, advertising material
Photographs	Actual photos or images from the internet, or images captured 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

Expectations

Visual Supports help to create clear expectations. How long will I be doing this for? We just did that, why do I have to do it again? I sat there yesterday and now someone else is in my spot?

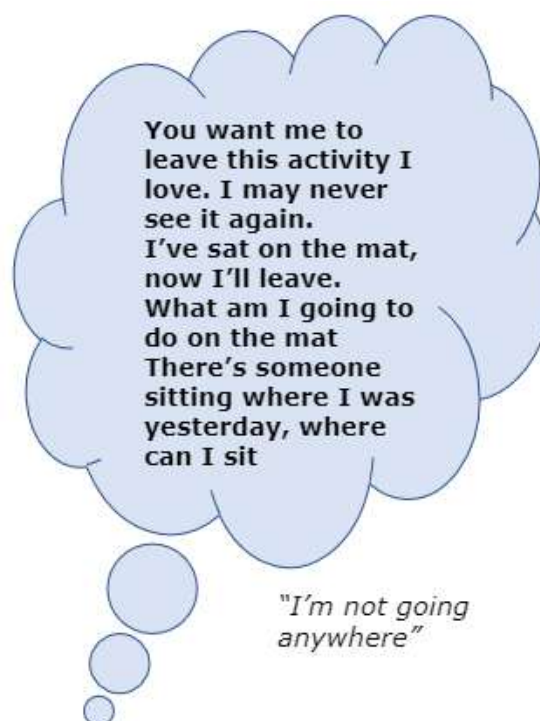
Many misunderstandings happen when everyone has a different expectation created by unclear verbal words/instructions.

Here are some examples of what the teacher and the student is thinking vs saying and where some misunderstandings may occur;

"Come and sit on the mat children"

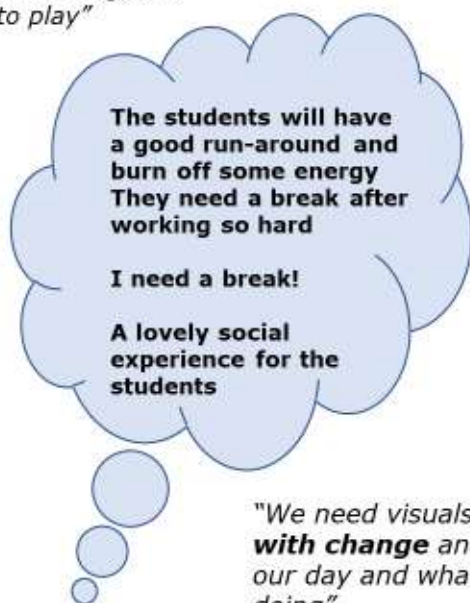


"We need visuals to show time and space"



"I'm not going anywhere"

"Time to go out to play"



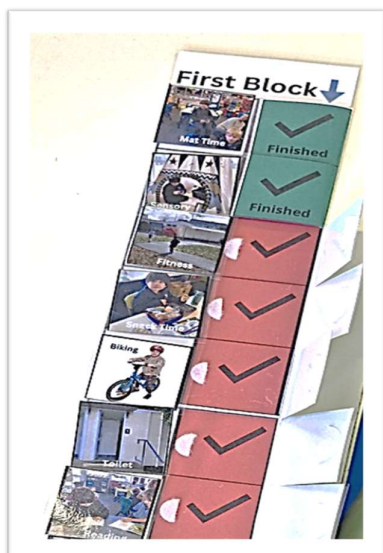
"We need visuals to help **with change** and to **plan** our day and what we are doing"



"GO AWAY!!!!!!!"

Types of Visual Supports

Visual Timetables



Having a daily visual timetable breaks the school day down into manageable and predictable chunks. The student can see exactly what they will be doing and when. Predictability tilts the seesaw.

When activities are finished, it is important that the student sees the timetable change. An activity can be rubbed out; removed and put in a 'finish box'; ticked off a list; or an arrow can be moved along to the next activity. (Applications (apps) for iPad and other touchscreen devices are also available.)

Since school days do not always go to plan, it is a good idea to also teach that sometimes there are surprise activities on a timetable!

Always schedule some breaks and some of the student's preferred activities into each day's timetable. Nobody wants to follow a tight schedule in which there is nothing they like to do.

Visual daily timetables can be done in all sorts of ways. They can be:

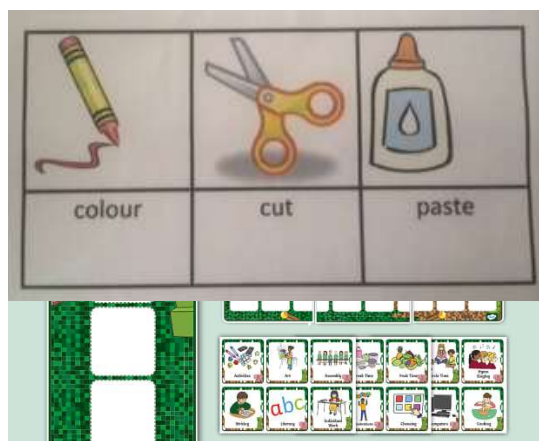
- Written as a list on the main classroom whiteboard.
- Displayed visually near the student's seat.
- Completed with objects, pictures or words.
- Kept discreetly inside a desk or a school planner book.
- Apps.

The coloured timetable below was used in a school where the classroom doors matched the subject colour on the timetable.

Daily Timetable

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:40 am	Hand Technology Room 1	Maths Room 1	Sports Science Room 1	Social Studies Room 1	English Room 1
9:40 am	Maths Room 1	Science Room 1	Science Room 1	English Room 1	Science Room 1
10:40 am	Tutor Group Room 1				
11:00 am	Interval				
11:25 am	Physical Education Room 1	English Room 1	Physical Education Room 1	Hand Technology Room 1	Health Room 1
12:25 pm	Social Studies Room 1	Hand Technology Room 1	Social Studies Room 1	Maths Room 1	Sports Science Room 1
1:25 pm	Lunch				
2:25 pm	Sports Science Room 1	Social Studies Room 1	English Room 1	Science Room 1	Maths Room 1
3:25 pm	Home				

Visual Lesson Plans



Many lesson plans include a sequence of activities. Having a visual representation of each of these activities in order helps the student work independently.

The key to success is to individualise the visual plan to suit your student's particular strengths and interests.

Physical education lessons can be particularly confusing for a student with autism. If you provide a visual sequence, the student is more likely to take part.

The following are some pictorial examples of how some typical lesson plan sequences can be made visual. These generic sequences can be used in a variety of different subject lessons.

A.	Complete worksheet.
B.	Draw picture of _____
C.	Choose _____ [laminated pictures of activities/books/puzzles] from choosing box.



Choosing Boxes

Choice Boards and



Choice boards and choosing boxes are useful ways to visually represent options to students.

They can be used to show a range of options in a lesson sequence, or the choices for filler activities or rewards once lessons are finished. The student uses them by removing the preferred option from the board or box.

Choice boards are usually made of a material on which you can attach cards containing single words or pictures that represent each option. You can make a

library of cards and attach only the ones that apply to the particular day or lesson.

Choosing boxes can contain the actual activities, books, and/or equipment that the student can choose from. They are especially useful for younger students.



Classroom Snapshot: Colour coding

Moving from subject to subject had become a struggle for Ellie. She agreed with her teacher that she could colour code each subject with separate magazine files which contained all she needed for that subject.



Visual Playground Schedules

For most students at school, interval (break or playtime) is supposed to be a time to recharge the batteries before getting back to schoolwork. For autistic students' playtime may be a really anxious time.

The playground can be a very confusing place, and the student may be at a loss as to what to do. They may not

understand the rules of playground games or find interacting with others difficult.

When considering visual supports for the playground, a selection of activities on a choosing board or in a clear-pocket booklet might help. Ensure at least one of the options is a quiet place to go or a job that could keep the student busy on their own.

Making Time Visual

The concept of time passing is difficult for any child to understand. For an autistic student, uncertainty about when and how long to do things can cause unnecessary anxiety.

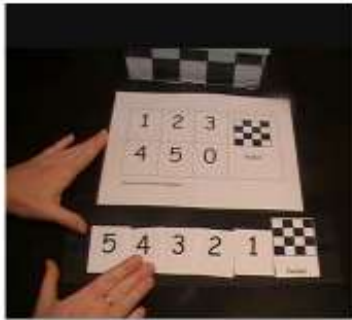
Knowing how long an activity will last gives reassurance and helps the student finish one activity and transition easily to the next.

Examples of timers you could use are:

- Egg timer
- Clockwork kitchen timer
- Smartphone countdown timer

Remember to start using a timer in a positive way first. For example; The child who has a visual timer to 'get off' or finish something they are really enjoying (often devices) may see the timer now as an object of hatred rather than purely a measure of time. Try "when the timer *begins* you can start (your activity) so they learn it as something positive. Then introduce it to finish as well.

We also may need to teach the concept of 'wait.'



Classroom Snapshot: Using a Whiteboard 'Rub-Off' Timetable

When he joined the class, Jacob constantly said to his teacher, 'Time to go home now, time to go home now'. To help Jacob understand timing and lesson sequences, his teacher has introduced a daily timetable that is written on the white board. Home time is clearly marked at the end.

The teacher has given Jacob the job of rubbing off each event of the day as it is finished. Jacob seems much less anxious about home time now, and he is more settled in his behaviour and more able to focus on the lessons.



Classroom Snapshot: Technology can be useful

Lots of students are motivated by information delivered in a digital way. Think about how you could deliver information via a closed YouTube channel or by making a video or downloading an app which delivers information.

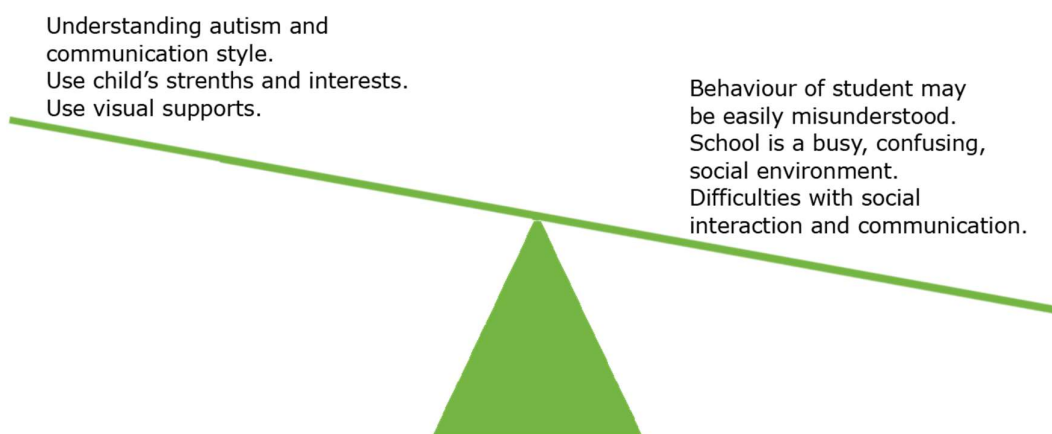
Technology can be useful:

- Identified by autistic students as particularly helpful (Autism CRC)
- Tasks that demand handwriting



- Taking photos of instructions
- Support the 'how' to carry out a task – organisation and planning

- Video Modelling
- Text messages
- Classroom support systems



Video References

A link to a short video from Autism Western Australia. Visuals in sport to explain the batting order in a game of cricket.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKLzjolknPk>