

Guides to using Home Visual Supports



**A collection of practical guides explaining how to use
a range of visual supports for social, language and
conversational partners**

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The following guides were written by the visual support project team to accompany visual symbol resources available on the following website www.thirdspace.scot/NAIT

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Introduction

The Home Visual Support Project was run by a team of education and health practitioners from the public sector and researchers interested in evidence based practice, between 2017-2019. We have written this resource, because of a gap we identified in the availability of information related to using visual supports at home. Following review of evidence from parents, young people, practitioners and research, we have compiled information and resources that we commonly use in the hope that it will be of practical use to others. It is not an exhaustive list, nor is it a curriculum or list of tasks to master. There are likely to be other ways of using or presenting visual supports that are just as effective.

What are visual supports?

Visual supports can be objects, photographs, symbols or written words. They can be printed and laminated for regular use or can be hand written on a white board, paper or a post it. They are often used with Velcro on the back for easy attachment and removal, although this is not compulsory.

Visual supports are used alongside other supports or interventions for children with a range of communication support needs, including autism. They are a relatively low cost support, although families may need assistance to print, laminate and put them together or to find helpful ways to organise and store them as the number of symbols increases.

Where are visual supports used?

- in schools and nurseries
- at home
- they can be used in any room in the house, depending on what is useful (e.g. a wash hands support could be in the bathroom, a countdown chart might be on the fridge to refer to daily)
- they can be portable for use outside home (e.g. in the car, when going shopping or on holiday)
- and in the community (at clubs or leisure activities or cafes)

What are the benefits of using home visual supports?

When matched to the child's stage and current needs they can:

- reduce anxiety
- increase predictability and desirability of day to day experiences
- support understanding
- support expressive communication
- support positive social routines and interaction with others
- support successful transitions and help prepare for change

As a result, they can improve:

- motivation
- engagement
- participation in the child or young person

They can also help to reduce stress and improve quality of life for the parents of children with additional support needs.

In a recent study carried out by the Home Visual Support Project Team, we found that structured support to use home visual supports, for families with children under 12 years of age led to measurable improvements in parent reported quality of life (Rutherford et al., submitted).

What helps families to have success with visual supports at home?

Through consultation with parents and professionals about their experiences, the visual support project team found that visual supports are less commonly available and used by families at home or in community settings (Rutherford et al., 2019). Families report that they are enabled to use visual supports at home when there is:

1) Access to visual support resources

2) Information that is timely and relevant

3) Developmental stage matched and individually relevant visual supports

- 4) Training or coaching to learn how to use them
- 5) Consistency between supports used in different settings (e.g. school and home)
- 6) Visual supports which help the individual to participate in activities which are meaningful and motivating

The free downloadable resources shared in this guide and online www.thirdspace.scot/NAIT aims to address the first three factors above.

Access

They provide access to pre-made resources for printing

Information

They provide accessible information and relevant guidance on what each resource is and how to use it. This supports families to identify supports which fit a need they have at present.

Developmental stage

The guides and resources are grouped into those relevant for three different developmental stages, to support families to identify supports that are most likely to be relevant to their child

Training or Coaching

This is not provided through this resource, however where they are available, your local health and education professionals may provide parent mediated interventions, parent groups or individualised guidance and discussion. This resource may also be relevant to providers of support for children and families.

Consistency

Consistency can be very important for some individuals. This does not mean that they need the same timetable at school and home because obviously different things happen in different contexts. Rather it means that the symbols used should be consistent and recognised in both contexts (e.g. the toilet symbol is the same at home and school)

The symbols used to represent different words and concepts in these resources are consistent with the Visual Support Project School and Nursery resources. For example the symbol for choose is the same across both resource packs.

When parents don't have access to the same resources as schools, they are not able to create matching resources at home. This resource could assist with this.

Meaningful and motivating

The people who know the child well can take account of things that will be meaningful and motivating to them when planning visual supports. Here are some Do's and Don'ts to help with this planning.

Do's	Don'ts
Pick and choose one or two supports and stick with that until you and your child are comfortable using them.	The list of guides in this resource is <u>not</u> intended to be a curriculum or a sequential list of supports to master. Do not try to teach all the supports for a stage as an end in itself
Keep using them	Once they work, don't stop using them. The goal was not to learn to use the support but for the support to help in daily life or when stress levels are higher
Individualise according to priorities for each child and family	There is no 'one size that fits all' Just because the child uses a visual timetable at school, might not mean this is your priority at home
Think of visual supports as a helpful addition to everyday life	Don't think of this as any kind of 'cure'
Plan and prepare and try to be consistent. Pick something that seems do-able in your family. If you need to get Velcro or print things off, enlist help if you need it to do this.	Try not to start with something that involves more planning and preparation that you can do. Don't be hard on yourself if you have days when it doesn't go to plan
Find a system for organising and storing your visual support resources (e.g. a folder, a box)	
Persist and seek support from others to problem solve challenges	Don't expect it to all go perfectly first time
Consider using different supports over time, as your child develops or as support needs change	Don't be scared to try a new or different support over time.

References

Rutherford, M., Baxter, J., Grayson, Z., Johnston, L., & O'Hare, A. (2019). Visual supports at home and in the community for individuals with autism spectrum disorders: A scoping review. *Autism*, 1362361319871756.

Rutherford, M., Baxter, J., Johnston, L., Tyagi, V., & Forsyth, K. (submitted)
It's so much more than just timetables: The Home Visual Support Project Pilot
Intervention Study for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

How this guide is structured

Different visual supports are used at different developmental stages. We have organised the guides here, to assist those selecting and planning to use visual supports to be mindful of stage. Each stage is colour coded as follows

At the Social Partner level children:

- use few or no meaningful words
- do not yet understand symbols consistently
- may or may not understand that one thing can stand for another
- may be beginning to recognise that one thing can represent another with motivating songs, words, objects, photos, pictures or songs heard or seen frequently

At the Language Partner level children:

- use more than 100 meaningful words and phrases
- understand object signifiers, photos and symbols
- understand that one thing can stand for another
- can talk about the here and now in short sentences
- do not have a strong grasp of conceptual language (e.g. feelings)
- may prefer objects and photos for some visual supports and visual symbols for others

At the Conversational Partner level children:

- engage in conversations with others using sentences
- understand object signifiers, photos and symbols and may read written words
- might still only be at a 'here and now' stage or may be able to talk about the past and future
- are beginning to grasp or may have a good understanding of conceptual language (e.g. feelings)
- may prefer object, photos or written words for some visual supports and visual symbols for others
- may still have difficulties with aspects of understanding and using social communication
- may still have a need for desirability and predictability to participate independently in daily or social routines
- experience other challenges, which mean they become overwhelmed and in these circumstances, they may not be able to explain why they have behaved in a certain way

There are associated Home Visual Support Resources, written by the authors of these guides, which can be used alongside the guides:

1. Visual Support resources, available at www.thirdspace.scot/NAIT
2. Parent Assessment Tools
3. Symbol Assessment Tools
4. Staff training pack for those supporting families with selecting and implementing relevant visual supports at home



A. Social Partners

Different visual supports are used at different developmental stages. Broadly children develop understanding in the following order:

1. Real objects referring to the actual thing (e.g. their cup)
2. Real objects representing something (e.g. a cup representing snack time)
3. Photographs
4. Symbols
5. Written words

We have tried to organise the guides here, to assist those selecting and planning to use visual supports to be mindful of stage.

At the Social Partner level children:

- use few or no meaningful words
- do not yet understand symbols consistently
- may or may not understand that one thing can stand for another
- may be beginning to recognise that one thing can represent another with motivating songs, words, objects, photos, pictures or songs heard or seen frequently

At Social Partner level we recommend the use of song signifiers or objects

- symbols or photos can be attached to support learning
- parents using these at home could speak to professionals who know your child for further information

The Home VSP Symbol Assessment Tool may be helpful in deciding whether to focus on objects

Examples of Visual Supports for Social Partners

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1. Objects of Reference



What are Objects of Reference?

Objects of Reference are a form of communication support. They provide individuals with consistent and meaningful information about what is happening in everyday situations. This can give a sense of security, reducing frustration or behaviour, arising as a result of confusion. Objects are more permanent and don't disappear in the way words do.

These are real or miniature objects* that come to represent a specific activity or event: for instance, a plate might become an Object of Reference for snack time. (**do not use small objects if individual puts objects in their mouth*).

Some activities, like going to the park, don't lend themselves to real or miniature depictions. In cases like this, something less concrete can be used, if it is used consistently. Alternatively, a photograph can be used instead i.e. photograph of the park. Objects are selected based on things the individual is interested in.

Example Object of Reference	Word(s) you could use or meaning the object represents
cup	drink
comforter	bed time
spoon	eat
cup	drink
duck	bath
comforter	bed time

Why are Objects of Reference used?

They are used to help the individual:

- when words don't always have meaning
- to understand what is happening, where to go or what to do next
- to learn the names of objects
- to make choices and communicate what they want

Why we say the same word each time we show the Objects of Reference:

- to give the individual the opportunity to regularly hear these words
- to help everyone around the individual use these same words for activities
- to help people use less language when communicating with the individual. This makes it easier for the individual to understand language.

How to start with Objects of Reference:

Step 1: Use a real object

When introducing objects of reference, you should start with objects that have a functional use, for example, the individual's own 'cup' - so that they can drink from the cup.

Later:

The next stage may be to show any type of 'cup' to show the individual it might be time for a drink.

Then:

Introduce objects of reference as a 'now visual timetable'

Try using objects of reference for favourite songs or activities

Other Useful Guides:

✓ Using Timers

✓ Using Objects of Reference to Make Choices

✓ Using Song Objects of Reference

✓ Using Now/ Next Visual Timetables with Objects of Reference

✓ Moving onto Using Photographs/ Symbols/ Written word only

2. 'Now' Visual Timetables with Objects of Reference



What are Now Visual Timetables?

A now visual timetable is used to show what is happening now. Each object of reference is typically shown one at a time or it can be presented on a now board



Why are Now Visual Timetables used?

Now visual timetables are used to signify the activity by holding up the relevant object of reference one at a time and saying what is happening now. For example, holding a brush whilst saying 'now brush hair'.

They are used to help an individual:

- understand what task or activity they are going to do
- focus on a task or activity
- transition from different activities
- complete a task that they are not motivated to do

How to introduce Now Visual Timetables with Objects of Reference:

- for ease of use, it is useful to keep the objects of reference in a box and have another box labelled finished
- start with showing the individual one object
- show the individual the relevant object at the time the activity is going to happen for example, show the spoon just before each mealtime/ snack etc.
- use the same word or song each time you show the object
- ask other adults or family members involved to try to use this word too
- let the individual take the object or you take the object to the activity and have a place it goes, while you do the activity
- when you have finished the activity, encourage them to put the object in a 'finished' box or bag

How to help the individual to use them

When introducing these objects of reference, the individual may:

- not look at the object
 - keep trying as this is not unexpected
- fleetingly look at the object
 - acknowledge this form of communication and say the word again
- take the object
 - name it again and move on to do the activity
 - have a box to put the object in while you do the activity. Always put the object in there.
- want to play with it

- as this may be a new experience allow the individual to explore the object for a short while then quickly move onto do the activity it represents. If the individual learns to play with this object it becomes a toy and loses its meaning as something that represents an activity.
- if the individual continues to play they will then see the object as a toy not an object of reference – provide other interesting toys/ objects or activities for playing with
- be inconsistent in responding to it
 - talk to the team about why this might be (e.g. not understanding, not being motivated, tiredness, time of day etc...)
 - it might be a normal part of learning
 - persist
- not want to do the activity (e.g. won't go to snack table when you show the plate)
 - take the plate with you or let them carry the plate – this will help them understand and keep remembering what is happening
 - keep the travel distance between showing and doing short
 - you can interpret this communication and say 'oh, no snack' if you are sure they understand. If they don't, you might want to bring the snack they like to the plate signifier and help them see the connection that good things happen when this plate comes out.

Possible next steps:

- introduce choice making using objects of reference
- introduce the use of now/ next with objects of reference
- introduce part day visual timetable

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Timers
- ✓ Using Objects of Reference to Make Choices
- ✓ Using Song Objects of Reference
- ✓ Using Now/ Next Visual Timetables with Objects of Reference
- ✓ Moving onto Using Photographs/ Symbols/ Written word only

3. Using 'Now' Visual Timetables with Photographs

What are Now Visual Timetables?

A now visual timetable is used to show what is happening now.



Why are Now Visual Timetables used?

Now visual timetables are used to signify the activity by holding up one photograph at a time and saying what is happening now. For example, holding a photograph of a hairbrush whilst saying 'now brush hair'.

They are used to help an individual:

- understand what task or activity they are going to do
- focus on a task or activity
- transition from different activities
- complete a task that they are not motivated to do

How to introduce a Now Visual Timetable with photographs

- gain the individual's attention
- show them the photo to prepare them for the activity just before it is to happen
- the photograph should be shown one at a time
- then take them to activity
- the individual can take the photograph to the activity
- if appropriate, when you have finished the activity encourage the individual to place the photograph in the finished pocket

Format of Now Visual Timetables using photographs

Each photograph is typically shown one at a time and is presented on a key ring or it can be presented on a now board



Possible next steps:



- add photos of key people the individual will be with 'now' (e.g. snack with Julie)
- introduce choice making with photographs
- introduce the use of now/ next with photographs
- introduce visual timetable for part day with photographs

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Timers
- ✓ Using Choice Boards with Photographs
- ✓ Using Now/ Next Boards with Photographs
- ✓ Using Visual Timetable with Photographs
- ✓ Moving to Using Photographs/ Symbols/ Written Word

4. Using Now/ Next Board with Objects of Reference

What are Now/ Next boards?



A now/ next board or visual timetable is used to show what is happening now, and what is coming next. Sometimes the words first/ then are used instead. The visual timetable can be made up of objects of reference. This example shows the routine of, now 'drink' and next 'story'.

Why are Now/Next boards used?

They are used to help an individual:

- focus on a task or activity
- understand what is happening now and next
- transition from different activities
- complete a task that they are not motivated to do

How to introduce Now/ Next boards with objects of reference

- choose two activities that are going to happen in sequence
- think about whether you offer a highly motivating activity first, second or for both
- place the object of reference that represents the first activity on the 'now' square
- place the object of reference that represents the second activity on the 'next' square
- show the individual the now/ next timetable and verbally reinforce the 'now' and 'next' activity in order by saying and pointing to for example, now 'drink' next 'story'
- then repeat now 'drink'
- when you have finished the activity, encourage them to put the object in a 'finished' box or bag

How to help the individual to use them

When introducing the now/ next visual timetable an individual may:

- not look at the objects of reference
 - keep trying as this is not unexpected
- fleetingly look at the objects of reference
 - acknowledge this form of communication and say the words again
- take the object of reference

- name it again and move on to do the activity
- be inconsistent in responding to it
 - talk to the team about why this might be (e.g. not understanding, not being motivated, tiredness, time of day etc...)
 - it might be a normal part of learning
 - persist
- not want to do the activity (e.g. won't go to the snack table when you show now snack)
 - take the now/ next board with you or let them carry it. This can help them understand and keep remembering what is happening
 - keep the travel distance between showing and doing short
 - when snack is finished put snack object of reference in the finished box and continue as above

Possible next steps:

- introduce visual timetable for part or whole day using objects of reference
- introduce choice making using objects of reference
- add photographs of key people the individual will be with 'now' and then 'next' (e.g. snack with Julie)

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Objects of Reference to Make Choices
- ✓ Using Timers
- ✓ Using Objects of Reference for Songs
- ✓ Using Visual Timetables with Objects of Reference
- ✓ Moving onto to Using Photographs/ Symbols/ Written word only

5. Using Visual Timetables with Objects of Reference

What are Visual Timetables?

A visual timetable is used to help individuals understand what they are doing over a specified period of time. The set of objects of reference used represent the sequence of events about to happen and generally refer to a range of daily or social routines. They can be of varying lengths for example, they can set out the plan for part of the day or the whole day.

Here is an example of a part day (bedtime routine)



Why are Visual Timetables used?

They are used to help an individual:

- understand what is happening over the specified period of time
- understand what task or activity they are about to do
- anticipate events
- focus on a task or activity
- transition from one activity to another
- develop independence
- understand time, routine and expectations
- make choices

How to introduce a Visual Timetable with objects of reference

- decide on the number of activities and amount of time to be shown
 - some individuals can become anxious when they see the whole day's events ahead of them. If so, you can break down the timetable into shorter intervals.
- typically, a system that incorporates a black 'current activity' pocket and finished box are used to present the visual timetable
- display the visual timetable somewhere that is easily accessible to the individual
- typically, the adults prepare the timetable in advance by placing the object of reference that represents the first activity to be done in the black 'current activity' pocket and the remaining objects of reference in sequence
- gain the individual's attention
- show them the visual timetable to prepare them for the sequence of events
- name each activity in order whilst pointing to the relevant object of reference as you name it, then begin the activities
- show the individual the object of reference in the black 'current activity' box and verbally reinforce by naming it for example, 'now' XXX whilst pointing to it
- ensure the activity is ready for them to do



- when the activity is finished place the object of reference in the finished box and verbally reinforce by saying for example, XXX 'finished' whilst pointing first to the object of reference then to the finished box
- move the next activity object of reference into the black 'current activity' box
- repeat as above. NB typically you do not need to then move each object of reference up to the black box. Leaving spaces helps show the passage of time.

How to help the individual to use them

When introducing an object of reference visual timetable an individual may:

- move away from the visual timetable
 - encourage the individual back to the visual timetable
 - if this persists you can take the visual timetable to the individual
- want to change the sequence of events by moving the objects of reference
- replace objects to their original order and show the individual what to do now

Possible Next Steps:

- encourage the individual to use the visual timetable with increasing independence; decide whether to start with one or both of the following steps:
 - putting the object of reference in the finished pocket
 - moving the next activity object into the black 'current activity' box
- each step can be taught by pointing to (physical prompt) and naming (verbal prompt) the object of reference you wish the individual to move, for example:
 - say XXX 'finished' whilst pointing to the object, then finished pocket
 - pause to give the individual the opportunity to move the object
 - if the individual does not attempt to do this, repeat the above process
 - if the individual attempts but cannot complete the step you can gently guide the individual's hand (hand under hand prompt) to the object and then to the finished pocket. Reinforce this with verbal instruction as above. (NB. This step is not advised for individuals who do not like to have their hands guided)
 - reduce any physical prompts / hand under hand guidance as the individual's independence increases
- the individual can become involved in the preparation of the visual timetable
- add choice board

Other Useful Guides:

✓ Objects of Reference

✓ Visual Timetables

6. Using Objects of Reference for Songs

What are Song Objects of Reference?

These are real or miniature objects* that come to represent a particular song.
(*Important - do not use small objects if individual puts objects in their mouth)

Why are Objects of Reference used?

They are used to help an individual:

- recognise a song
- transition from one song to another
- choose a song
- participate in song
- participate in group singing



How to introduce Song Objects of Reference

- select a few of the individual's favourite songs. Assign a single object to represent a song, e.g. toy boat for 'Row the Boat', star for 'Twinkle, Twinkle', toy car for 'I have been driving in my car'
- show the individual the relevant object at the time you are going to sing the song
- store the objects in a bag or box

How to help the individual to use them

- ensure the individual can see the object of reference during the song
- the individual may want to hold the object of reference
- store the objects of reference in an accessible location to allow the individual to initiate or request a song by bringing the object to a person

Possible next steps:

- introduce choice making using song objects of reference
- introduce song symbols

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Objects of Reference to Make Choices
- ✓ Using Symbols for Songs
- ✓ Using a Symbol Song Book

7. Using Objects of Reference to Make Choices



When an individual is familiar with using a selection of objects of reference, these objects can also be used to offer choice. They provide an individual with a clear visual choice of objects or activities and give them some control over their day.

Why are Objects of Reference used to make choices?

They can help an individual make meaningful choices about everyday activities. They may, for example, learn to select an object of reference from a choice of two to indicate a preferred activity.

How to introduce Objects of Reference to offer choice:

- start with showing the individual a choice of two familiar objects
- make sure these activities are available to be done straight away
- hold the objects where the individual can look at them
- verbally give them the choice using language appropriate to the individual's stage: this is likely to be one or two key words e.g. 'drink', which could be followed by a phrase... 'want drink?'
- give them their chosen object or take them to their chosen activity as soon as they have made a choice – it is important that they make a link between choosing a motivating activity and doing it
- when you have finished the activity, encourage them to put the object in a 'finished' box or bag

How to help the individual to use them:

- start by introducing a choice from two familiar objects of reference
- the options will usually be activities the child likes so they are motivated to make the choice i.e. drink/ food or songs

When introducing two choices using Objects of Reference an individual may:

- fleetingly look at the object
 - acknowledge this form of communication, name the activity again and move on to do the activity
- take the object
 - name it again and move on to do the activity
 - have a box to put the object in while you do the activity - always put the object in there
- reach for both objects
 - repeat the choice using the appropriate key words

- If using more than one key word you could try simplifying your language
- continuously reach for or name the last choice offered
- swap the objects around

Possible next steps:

- you can increase the number of choices once an individual can confidently choose between two options
- once the above is established you can introduce a less familiar activity to enhance the individual's opportunity to try new activities
- add photographs of key people the individual will be with for these activities e.g. story with Julie

When introducing or moving onto increasing the number of choices an individual may:

- find it difficult to choose from four preferred activities
 - reduce options to three if the individual seems overwhelmed or unable to decide

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Song Objects of Reference
- ✓ Moving onto Using Photographs/ Symbols
- ✓ Using Choice Boards with Photographs
- ✓ Using Choice Boards with Symbols

8. Using Home Communication Diaries with Objects of Reference

What are Home Communication Diaries?

A home communication diary shows the activities an individual has been involved in at home or at nursery/ school. They can reflect the core activities, or all the activities done. The visual supports used to represent the activities can be objects of reference, photographs or symbols.

Examples of Home Communication Diaries using objects of reference:



Why are Home Communication Diaries used?

They are used to help an individual:

- share information between home and school and vice-versa
- recall activities
- develop social skills

How to introduce a Home Communication Diary:

Preparing the home communication diary to take to home/ school:

- sit with the individual to discuss the activities done at either school or home
- discuss one activity at a time in the sequence of events as they happened, showing the individual the relevant object of reference at the same time
- the individual can then be involved in putting the objects of reference in the bag to prepare it for taking home or to school

Using the Home Communication Diary to share information:

- sit with the individual and start by saying for example, 'What did you do at home?'
- remove the relevant object of reference one at a time
- name and discuss each activity as appropriate

Format of Home Communication Diary:

Objects of reference can be stored:

- in a bag
- in a box

This can be supported by written or verbal information from home/ school

How to help the individual to use them:

When introducing these the individual may:

- not show any interest
 - that's ok, it might take time for them to understand the meaning or connection between something they did earlier
 - you can still keep the routine of getting the 'diary' out, holding the objects and putting them back
 - you could pick one object you think is most motivating and show this
 - involve them in putting objects in the bag as soon as they finish an activity to help them make the connection
 - you might have a favourite song that links the objects, which captures their attention
- need adults to model, e.g. 'Jo was painting'
 - you may need to repeat and persist with this

Possible next steps:

Preparing for taking home/ school

- the individual can be involved in selecting the appropriate object of reference and putting them in the bag to prepare it for taking home or to nursery
- the individual could choose one activity done at home to share at circle/ gather time. The object of reference can be used as a prompt. This can be used in conjunction with any augmented communication tools such as switch etc.

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Home Communication Diaries with Photographs or Symbols

B. Language Partners

Different visual supports are used at different developmental stages. Broadly children develop understanding in the following order:

1. Real objects referring to the actual thing (e.g. their cup)
2. Real objects representing something (e.g. a cup representing snack time)
3. Photographs
4. Symbols
5. Written words

We have tried to organise the guides here, to assist those selecting and planning to use visual supports to be mindful of stage.

At the Language Partner level children:

- use more than 100 meaningful words and phrases
- understand object signifiers, photos and symbols
- understand that one thing can stand for another
- can talk about the here and now in short sentences
- do not have a strong grasp of conceptual language (e.g. feelings)
- may prefer objects and photos for some visual supports and visual symbols for others

At Language Partner level we recommend the use of a range of visual supports

- the written word can be used along with other visuals to support learning, although we would not expect to use words without pictures as the main visual support
- parents using these at home could speak to professionals who know your child for further information

Examples of visual supports for Language Partners

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9. Moving onto Using Photographs or Symbols

Please refer to relevant part of this guide

Moving on from using objects of reference to using photographs or symbols

When you think the individual is ready to move on from using objects of reference to using either photographs or symbols you can either:

- show the relevant photograph or symbol alongside the object of reference



- or if you are using an object of reference board you can add the relevant photograph or symbol to the board



Next step:

As the individuals understanding of the photograph or symbol develops – remove the object of reference and show photograph or symbol only.

How to help the individual use them:

- when moving onto to photo level it is important to take a photo of the object of reference the individual is currently using and ensure the photo contains a clear image of that object only - avoiding additional clutter, for example:



- begin by showing the photo/ symbol alongside the key objects of reference
- as the individual's understanding of the photograph or symbol develops – remove the object of reference and show photograph or symbol only

Next steps:

- introduce remaining objects of reference with photographs and symbols
- if you feel the individual is not understanding the remaining symbols return to showing them beside the object of reference or activity

Moving on from using photographs to using symbols

When you think the individual is ready to move on from using photographs to symbols you can introduce symbols. If you are not sure or find the individual is struggling with this change you can try:

- showing the relevant symbol alongside the photograph

Next step:

As the individual's understanding develops, remove the photograph and show symbol only.

Moving on to using the written word

This is not a necessary step. However, when an individual reads well, they may like to use written schedules, Social Stories or other written supports, with or without symbols.

All symbols are usually presented with the written word and over time you may choose to reduce the size of the symbol to make the written word more salient.

There are some instances when symbols will always be helpful, especially at times of anxiety or stress so it is unwise to remove these too soon.

10. Using 'Now' Visual Timetables with Symbols

What are Now Visual Timetables?

A now visual timetable is used to show what is happening now.



Format of Now Visual Timetables with symbols:

Each symbol is typically shown one at a time and is presented on a key ring or it can be presented on a now board.



Why are Now Visual Timetables used?

Now visual timetables are used to signify the activity by holding up one symbol at a time and saying what is happening now. For example, holding a 'brush teeth' symbol whilst saying 'now brush teeth'.

They are used to help an individual:

- understand what task or activity they are going to do
- focus on a task or activity
- transition from different activities
- complete a task that they are not motivated to do

How to introduce a Now Visual Timetable with symbols

- gain the individual's attention
- show them the symbol to prepare them for the activity just before the activity is to happen
- the symbol should be shown one at a time
- then take them to activity
- the individual can take the symbol to the activity
- if appropriate, when you have finished the activity encourage the individual to place the symbol in the finished pocket

Other Useful Guides:

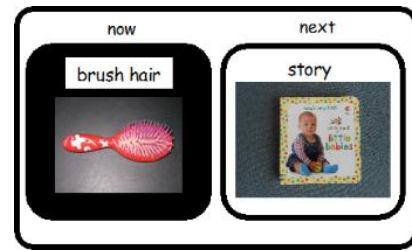
✓ Using Timers

✓ Using Now and Next Visual Timetables with Symbols

✓ Using Visual Timetables with Symbols

11. Using Now/ Next Visual Timetables with Photographs

What are Now/ Next Visual Timetables?



A now/ next visual timetable shows what is happening now, and what is coming next. Sometimes the words first/ then are used instead. The visual timetable can be made up of photographs. This example shows the routine of 'now brush hair' and 'next story'

Why are Now/ Next Visual Timetables used?

They are used to help an individual:

- focus on a task or activity
- understand what is happening now and next
- transition from different activities
- complete a task that they are not motivated to do

How to introduce Now/ Next Visual Timetables

- choose two activities that are going to happen in sequence
- think about whether you offer a highly motivating activity first, second or for both
- place the photograph that represents the first activity on the black 'now' box
- place the photograph that represents the second activity on the 'next' box
- show the individual the now/ next visual timetable and verbally reinforce the 'now' and 'next' activity in order by saying for example, 'now brush hair' 'next story' whilst pointing to the photograph. Then repeat 'now brush hair'.
- when you have finished the activity, encourage them to put the photograph in the 'finished' pocket

How to help the individual to use them

When introducing the now/ next visual timetable an individual may:

- not look at the photograph
 - keep trying as this is not unexpected
- fleetingly look at the photograph
 - acknowledge this form of communication and say the words again
- take the photograph
 - name it again and move on to do the activity
 - put the photograph back on the now/ next visual timetable
- want to play with the photograph

- as this may be a new experience allow the individual to explore the photograph for a short while, then quickly move onto do the activity it represents
- if the individual learns to play with the photograph it becomes a toy and loses its meaning as something that represents an activity.
- put the photograph back on the now/ next visual timetable
- be inconsistent in responding to it
 - talk to the team about why this might be (e.g. not understanding, not being motivated, tiredness, time of day etc...)
 - it might be a normal part of learning
 - persist
- not want to do the activity (e.g. won't go to the snack table when you show the photograph)
 - take the now/ next board with you or let them carry it – this will help them understand and keep remembering what is happening
 - keep the travel distance between showing and doing short
 - interpret this communication and say 'oh no snack' if you are sure they understand. If they don't, you might want to bring the snack they like to the photograph and help them see the connection that good things happen when this photograph comes out.
- not want to do the activity on the 'now' box but want to do the 'next' activity
 - repeat the phrase 'now brush hair' 'next story' whilst pointing to the relevant photograph. Repeat 'now brush hair'
- for ease of use you can carry the now/ next visual timetable by presenting it on a keyring, for example:



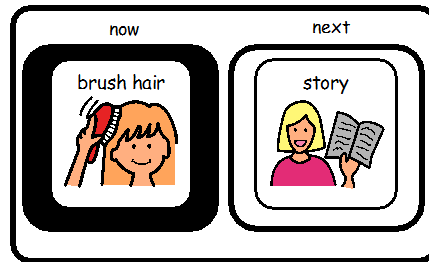
Possible next steps:

- encourage the individual to use the now/ next visual timetable with increasing independence; decide whether to start with one or both of the following steps:
 - putting the photograph in the finished pocket
 - moving the next activity photograph onto the black 'now' box
- each step can be taught by pointing to (physical prompt) and naming (verbal prompt) the photograph you wish the individual to move for example:
 - say XXX 'finished' whilst pointing to the photograph then finished pocket
 - pause at this point to give the individual the opportunity to move the photograph
- if the individual does not attempt to do this, repeat the above process
- if the individual attempts but cannot complete the step you can gently guide the individual's hand (hand under hand prompt) to the photograph and then to the finished pocket. Reinforce this with verbal instruction as above. (NB. This step is not advised for individuals who do not like to have their hands guided)
 - reduce any physical prompts/ hand under hand guidance as the individual's independence increases
- introduce visual timetable for part or whole day

12. Using Now/ Next Visual Timetables with Symbols

What are Now/ Next Visual Timetables?

A now/ next visual timetable is used to show what is happening now, and what is coming next. Sometimes the words first/ then are used instead. The visual timetable can be made up of symbols. This shows the routine of 'now brush hair' and 'next story'.



Why are Now/ Next Visual Timetables used?

They are used to help an individual:

- focus on a task or activity
- understand what is happening now and next
- transition from different activities
- complete a task that they are not motivated to do

How to introduce Now/ Next Visual Timetables

- choose two activities that are going to happen in sequence
- think about whether you offer highly motivating activities first, second or for both
- place the symbol that represents the first activity on the black 'now' box
- place the symbol that represents the second activity on the 'next' box
- show the individual the now/ next visual timetable and verbally reinforce the 'now' and 'next' activity in order by saying for example, 'now brush hair' 'next story' whilst pointing to the symbol. Then repeat 'now brush hair'.
- when you have finished the activity, encourage them to put the symbol in the 'finished' pocket

How to help the individual to use them

When introducing the now/ next visual timetable an individual may:

- not look at the symbol
 - keep trying as this is not unexpected
- fleetingly look at the symbol
 - acknowledge this form of communication and say the words again
- take the symbol
 - name it again and move on to do the activity
 - put the symbol back on the now/ next visual timetable
- want to play with the symbol
 - as this may be a new experience allow the individual to explore the symbol for a short while then quickly move onto do the activity it represents. If the

individual learns to play with the symbol it becomes a toy and loses its meaning as something that represents an activity.

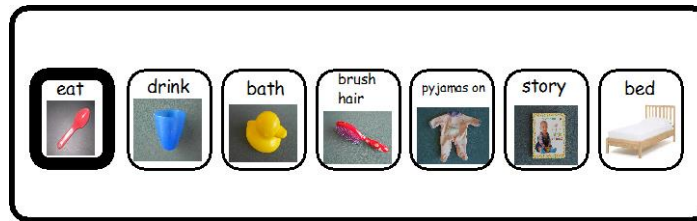
- put the symbol back on the now/ next visual timetable
- be inconsistent in responding to it
 - talk to the team about why this might be (e.g. not understanding, not being motivated, tiredness, time of day etc...)
 - it might be a normal part of learning
 - persist
- not want to do the activity (e.g. won't go to the snack table when you show the symbol)
 - take the now/ next board with you or let them carry it – this will help them understand and keep remembering what is happening
 - keep the travel distance between showing and doing - short
 - you can interpret this communication and say 'oh no snack' if you are sure they understand. If they don't – you might want to bring the snack they like to the symbol and help them see the connection that good things happen when this symbol comes out.
- not want to do the activity on the 'now' box but want to do activity on the 'next' box
- repeat the phrase 'now brush hair' 'next story' whilst pointing at the relevant symbol; repeat 'now brush hair'
- for ease of use you can carry the now/ next visual timetable by presenting it on a keyring, for example:



Possible next steps:

- encourage the individual to use the now/ next visual timetable with increasing independence. Decide whether to start with one or both of the following steps:
 - putting the symbol in the finished pocket
 - moving the next activity symbol onto the black 'now' box
- each step can be taught by pointing to (physical prompt) and naming (verbal prompt) the symbol you wish the individual to move for example:
- say '(XXX) finished' whilst pointing to the symbol then finished pocket
- pause at this point to give the individual the opportunity to move the symbol
- if the individual does not attempt to do this, repeat the above process
- if the individual attempts but cannot complete the step you can gently guide the individual's hand (hand under hand prompt) to the symbol and then to the finished pocket. Reinforce this with verbal instruction as above. (NB. This step is not advised for individuals who do not like to have their hands guided)
- reduce any physical prompts/ hand under hand guidance as the individual's independence increases
- introduce visual timetable for part or whole day

13. Using Visual Timetables with Photographs



What are Visual Timetables?

A visual timetable is used to help an individual understand what they are doing over a specified period of time. The set of photographs used represent the sequence of events about to happen and generally refer to a range of daily or social routines. They can be of varying lengths for example, they can set out the plan for part of the day or the whole day. Above is an example of a part day timetable (bedtime routine).

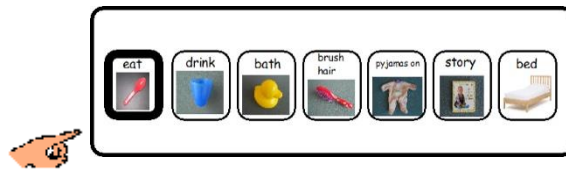
Why are Visual Timetables used?

They are used to help an individual:

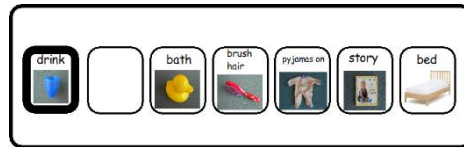
- understand what is happening over the specified period of time
- understand what task or activity they are about to do
- anticipate events
- focus on a task or activity
- transition from one activity to another
- develop independence
- understand time, routine and expectations
- make choices

Using a Visual Timetable with Photographs

- decide on the number of activities and amount of time to be shown
- some individuals become anxious when they see the whole day's events ahead of them therefore, it is best to break down the timetable into shorter intervals
- typically, a current activity strip and finished pocket are used to with the visual timetable
- display the visual timetable somewhere that is easily accessible to the individual
- typically, the adults prepare the timetable in advance by placing the photographs that represents the first activity to be done on the black 'current activity' box and the remaining photographs in sequence
- gain the individual's attention
- show them the visual timetable to prepare them for the sequence of events
- name each activity in order whilst pointing to the relevant photo as you name it
- the word used should be the word written on the photograph
- then begin the activities
- show the individual the photograph on the black 'current activity' box and verbally reinforce by naming it for example, 'now (XXX)' whilst pointing to the photograph



- ensure the activity is ready for them to do
- when the activity is finished place the photograph in the finished pocket and verbally reinforce by saying for example, '(XXX) finished' whilst pointing first to the photograph then to the finished pocket
- move the next activity photograph onto the black 'current activity' box



- repeat as above. NB typically you do not need to then move each photograph up. Leaving spaces helps show the passage of time.

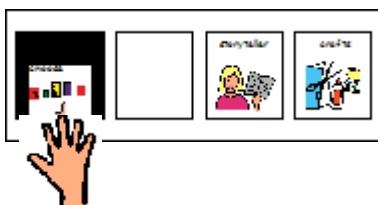
How to help the individual to use them

When introducing a visual timetable an individual may move away from the visual timetable

- encourage the individual back to the visual timetable
- if this persists you can take the visual timetable to the individual
- a visual timetable can be made portable by attaching the current activity strip and finished pocket to a folder in one of the following ways:



or



- Individuals may want to change the sequence of events by moving the photos
 - replace the photographs to their original order and show the individual what they are to do now

Possible Next Steps:

- encourage the individual to use the visual timetable with increasing independence:
- decide whether to start with one or both of the following steps:

- putting the photograph in the finished pocket
- moving the next activity photograph onto the black 'current activity' box
- each step can be taught by pointing to (physical prompt) and naming (verbal prompt) the photograph you wish the individual to move for example:
 - say '(XXX) finished' whilst pointing to the photograph then finished pocket
 - pause at this point to give the individual the opportunity to move the photo
 - if the individual does not attempt to do this, repeat the above process
 - if the individual attempts but cannot complete the step you can gently guide the individual's hand (hand under hand prompt) to the photograph and then to the finished pocket. Reinforce this with verbal instruction as above. (NB. This step is not advised for individuals who do not like to have their hands guided.)
 - reduce any physical prompts / hand under hand guidance as the individual's independence increases
- the individual can become involved in the preparation of the visual timetable; encourage this
- introduce a portable visual timetable
- add choice board

Other Useful Guides:

✓ Using Visual Timetables

✓ Using Timers

✓ Using Choice Boards with Photographs

✓ Moving onto Using Photographs/ Symbols/ Written word only

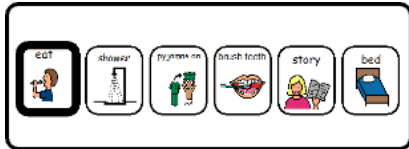
14. Using Visual Timetables with Symbols

What are Visual Timetables?

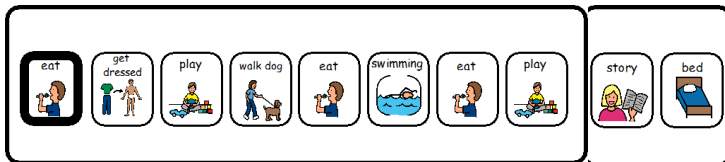
A visual timetable is used to help an individual understand what they are doing over a specified period of time. The set of symbols used represent the sequence of events about to happen and generally refer to a range of daily or social routines. They can be of varying lengths for example, they can set out the plan for part of the day or the whole day. Children need to be taught how to use them and adults need to make sure they are true.

Examples of Visual Timetables using symbols:

Part day (bedtime routine)



Whole day



Why are Visual Timetables used?

They are used to help an individual:

- understand what is happening over the specified period of time
- understand what task or activity they are about to do
- anticipate events
- focus on a task or activity
- transition from one activity to another
- develop independence
- understand time, routine and expectations
- make choices

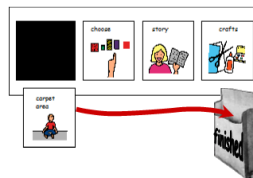
How to introduce a Visual Timetable with symbols:

- decide on the number of activities and amount of time to be shown
- Some individuals become anxious when they see the whole day's events ahead of them therefore, it is best to break down the timetable into shorter intervals
- typically, a current activity strip and finished pocket are used on the timetable
- display the visual timetable somewhere that is easily accessible to the individual
- typically, the adults prepare the timetable in advance by placing the symbol that represents the first activity to be done on the black 'current activity' box and the remaining symbols in sequence
- gain the individual's attention

- show them the visual timetable to prepare them for the sequence of events
- name each activity in order whilst pointing to the relevant symbol as you name it the word used should be the word written on the symbol
- then begin the activities
- show the individual the symbol on the black 'current activity' box and verbally reinforce by naming it for example, 'now (XXX)' whilst pointing to the symbol
- ensure the activity is ready for them to do
- when the activity is finished place the symbol in the finished pocket and verbally reinforce by saying for example, '(XXX) finished' whilst pointing first to the symbol then to the finished pocket



- move the next activity symbol onto the black 'current activity' box



symbol onto the black 'current activity' box

- repeat as above. (NB you do not need to then move each symbol up to the black box. Leaving spaces helps show the passage of time.)

How to help the individual to use them:

When introducing a visual timetable an individual may move away from the visual timetable.

- encourage the individual back to the visual timetable
- if this persists you can take the visual timetable to the individual

A visual timetable can be made portable by attaching the current activity strip and finished pocket to a folder in one of the following ways:

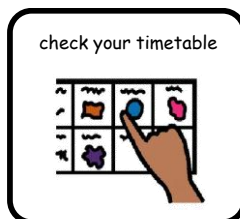


or



Children may want to change the sequence of events by moving the symbols. If so, you can replace the symbols to their original order and show the individual what they are to do now.

Check your timetable cards



You can support an individual to independently return to their timetable or sequence chart by using a check your timetable card. You can:

- place this on the wall or near the schedule
- or you could carry one in your pocket or on a keyring
- point to it, or show it to the individual
- say, 'check your timetable'
- they may initially need a physical prompt to go back to the timetable and work out where they are in the sequence
- gradually reduce prompts

Possible Next Steps:

- encourage the individual to use the visual timetable with increasing independence
- decide whether to start with one or both of the following steps:
 - putting the symbol in the finished pocket
 - moving the next activity symbol onto the black 'current activity' box
- each step can be taught by pointing to (physical prompt) and naming (verbal prompt) the symbol you wish the individual to move, for example:
 - say '(XXX) finished' whilst pointing to the symbol then finished pocket
 - pause at this point to give the individual the opportunity to move the symbol
 - if the individual does not attempt to do this, repeat the above process
 - if the individual attempts but cannot complete the step you can gently guide the individual's hand (hand under hand prompt) to the symbol and then to the finished pocket. Reinforce this with verbal instruction as above. (NB. This step is not advised for individuals who do not like to have their hands guided.)
- reduce any hand under hand guidance followed by other prompts as the individual's independence increases
- the individual can become involved in the preparation of the visual timetable
- use a visual timetable whilst out and about. The following system is often used to make a portable visual timetable easier to transport:



15. Using Weekly or Monthly Visual Timetables with Symbols or Photos

What are Weekly/ Monthly Visual Timetables?

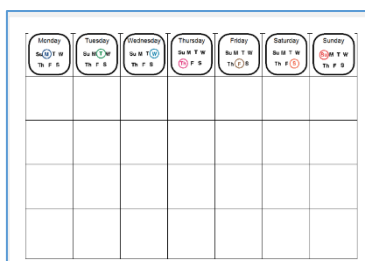
These visual timetables show the core elements of what is happening over a weekly or monthly period. They can be particularly helpful in outlining predictable events ahead:

- when a parent is working away
- when grandparents are visiting
- school days/ days spent at home

They can be used in conjunction with a daily visual timetable.

Examples of Weekly/ Monthly Visual Timetables:

A weekly visual timetable



A monthly visual calendar

August 2018						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th birthday party	5th home
6th playscheme	7th playscheme	8th playscheme	9th playscheme	10th playscheme	11th home	12th home
13th home	14th home	15th home	16th home	17th home	18th home	19th home
20th granny	21st school	22nd school	23rd school	24th school	25th home	26th home
27th school	28th school	29th school	30th school	31st school		

Why are Weekly/ Monthly Visual Timetables used?

They are used to help an individual:

- understand what events are happening over the week/ month
- anticipate events
- relieve anxiety
- develop independence
- understand time, routine and expectations

How to introduce a Weekly/ Monthly Visual Timetable

- decide on the length of time to be displayed on the chart
- decide where best to display the chart
- gain the individual's attention
- show them the chart and discuss the week's events whilst pointing to and naming the activities

Format of Weekly/ Monthly Visual timetables:

Weekly or monthly calendars can also be incorporated into various forms of technology including phone calendars.

How to help the individual to use them

- decide the best time to introduce and discuss the weeks/ months events
- incorporate them into routines such as checking them at bedtime or each day before breakfast

Other Useful Guides:

✓ Moving onto to Photographs/ Symbols/ Written word only

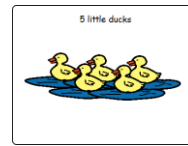
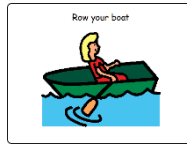
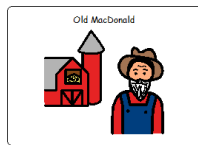
✓Using visual timetables

✓Using timers

16. Using Symbols for Songs

What are Song Symbols?

A song symbol is a symbol that comes to represent a particular song. For example:



Why are they used?

They are used to help an individual:

- recognise a song
- transition from one song to another
- choose a song
- participate in song
- participate in group singing

How to introduce Song Symbols

- pick a few of the individual's favourite songs; select or make an appropriate symbol to represent each song
- display the symbols on a board, carpet mat, folder
- show the individual the relevant symbol each time you sing the song and keep it on display where the individual can see it whilst you sing the song
- when you have finished the song, encourage the individual to put the song symbol back on the board/ mat or folder and say, e.g. 'Wheels on the bus is finished'

How to help the individual to use them

- initially, show the newly introduced symbol alongside any previously used song object of reference
- remove the use of song objects of reference when familiar with the song symbol
- store the song symbols in an accessible location to allow the individual to initiate or request a song by bringing the symbol to a person

Possible next steps:

- introduce choice making using song symbols building up to a choice of four or six
- introduce a symbol song book

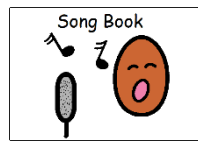
Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Choice Boards with Symbols
- ✓ Using a Symbol Song Book

17. Information about Using a Symbol Song Book

What are Symbol Song Books?

A symbol song book is used to offer a choice of songs and an action/ step within a song.



Why are they used?

They are used to help an individual:

- choose a song from the selection offered
- understand the actions or steps within the song
- choose an action or step within the song
- participate in song
- participate in singing time, e.g. choosing a song, taking their turn, etc.

How to introduce Symbol Song Book?

- introduce this when you know the individual is familiar with the song symbols within the book
- use the song book each time you sing with the individual
- when you have finished the activity, encourage them to the song symbol back in the book and say e.g. 'Wheels on the bus is finished'

How to help the individual to use them?

- start with showing the individual which songs they can choose
- reduce the number of song symbol choices if the individual is overwhelmed by the level of choice
- introduce the action or step symbols within songs, e.g. 'the wheels go round and round'. As you sing each step, show the individual the relevant symbol by pointing to it and place the symbol on the strip below, continue to sing. Then show the child how to return the symbol and select another one. Reduce your role modelling/ prompting as the individual becomes more familiar/ independent.



- once the individual is familiar with the above step symbols offer them a choice of symbols within the chosen song

- reduce the number of song action symbol choices if the individual appears overwhelmed by the level of choice

Possible next steps:

- introduce turn taking by using the symbol song book with a family member
- once turn taking with one or two family members is established increase the opportunities for turn taking with siblings/ peers
- the individual can offer a choice to family members/ peers

18. Using Timers

What are Timers?

A sand or digital timer can be used to show an individual how long a current activity or situation will last or as a countdown to prepare them for an activity coming to an end. These can be low tech (sand timers) or high tech (iPad, digital). Digital or iPad timers can be set to the desired length of time and sand timers have different time durations for example, 3, 5, 10-minute durations. They are often used in conjunction with visual timetables/ choice boards.

Examples of Timers:



sand timer



countdown clock



iPad

Why are Timers used?

They are used to help an individual:

- understand how long a current situation or activity will last
- understand when an activity or situation will finish
- predict and prepare for an activity or situation to finish
- transition from one activity to another
- transition from a favoured to less favoured activity

How to introduce a Timer

- Decide on the purpose of the timer:
 - if the timer is being used to show the individual how long a current situation or activity will last – decide whether a 3, 5 or 10 minute period is appropriate
 - if the timer is to prepare the individual for an activity coming to an end only, decide whether a 3, 5 or 10 minute countdown is best
 - place the timer where the individual can see it. Activate the timer and for example say '(XXX) finished in 5 minutes' and point to the timer
 - remind the individual again by saying '(XXX) finished in 4 minutes' pointing to timer
 - remind again by saying '(XXX) finished in 3 minutes' and pointing to timer.
 - continue until timer is complete

How do I help an individual to use them?

When introducing a timer an individual may:

- try to remove the sand timer

- initially you can hold the timer until the individual is more familiar with
- what it represents
- turn a sand timer over once the initial time is up
 - you can place a piece of Velcro on to the bottom part of the sand timer. This acts as an additional visual support and you can teach the individual that this indicates the time is finished.

Possible next steps

- as the individual becomes familiar with this routine you can cut down the number of reminders
- the individual can be involved in setting or turning the timer

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Visual Timetables with Objects of Reference
 - ✓ Using Visual Timetables with Photographs
 - ✓ Using Visual Timetables with Symbols
- ✓ Using Choice Boards with Objects of Reference
 - ✓ Using Choice Boards with Photographs
 - ✓ Using Choice Boards with Symbols

19. Using Choice Boards with Photographs

What are Choice boards?

Choice boards support an individual to make a choice and communicate what they wish to do next. They provide an individual with a clear visual choice of objects or activities and give them some control over their day. They simplify a choice by providing two or four options to choose from.

Examples of Choice boards used:

Two choices



Four choices



Why are Choice Boards used?

- to support an individual, choose what they would like to do next from several options
- a photograph of each object/ activity helps an individual to make a clear choice

How to introduce Choice Boards:

- create photographs for each object/ activity choice that the individual will enjoy
- decide whether you are introducing a two or four choice board
- select two or four options each time you use the choice board and make sure these activities are available to be done straight away
- place your choices on the choice board in the empty boxes and ask the individual to choose an activity by moving a photograph into the black 'now' box at the top of the choice board



- give the chosen object or take the individual to their chosen activity as soon as they have made a choice – it is important that they make a link between choosing a motivating activity and doing it
- some individuals do not point or their joint attention is at an early stage. For these individuals, taking the photograph in their hand to choose works better than pointing.

How to help the individual to use them:

- if the individual is not familiar with choice making start by introducing a two-choice board
- the options will usually be activities the child likes so they are motivated to make the choice

When introducing a two-Choice Board an individual may:

- find it difficult to choose from two preferred activities. If so, the options can be changed to one preferred and one less preferred (less or non-preferred means the individual is neutral about the activity rather than that they dislike it)
- find it difficult to choose from symbols. If so, you could try using the real objects alongside the photographs to aid the individual's understanding

You can also increase the number of choices once the individual can confidently choose between two options.

When introducing or moving onto a four-Choice Board an individual may:

- find it difficult to choose from four preferred activities
 - you can reduce options to three if the child seems overwhelmed or unable to decide

Possible next steps:

- introduce a less familiar activity to enhance the individual's opportunities to try new activities/ experiences
- introduce different kinds of choices: snacks, activities, friends to be in their group
- choice making with photographs and/ or symbols

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Timers
- ✓ Using Visual Timetables with Photographs
- ✓ Moving onto Using Photographs/ Symbols
- ✓ Using Choice Boards with Symbols

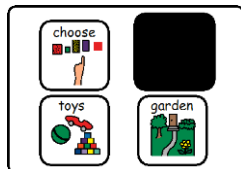
20. Using Choice Boards with Symbols

What are Choice Boards?

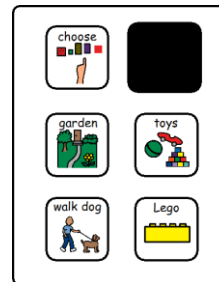
Choice boards support an individual to make a choice and communicate what they wish to do next. They provide an individual with a clear visual choice of objects or activities and give them some control over their day. They simplify a choice by providing two or four options to choose from.

Examples of Choice Boards used:

Two choices



Four choices



Why are Choice Boards used?

- to support an individual, choose what they would like to do next from several options
- a visual symbol of each object helps an individual to make a clear choice

How to introduce Choice Boards:

- create symbols for the activity choices that the individual will enjoy
- decide whether you are introducing a two or four choice board
- select two/ four options each time you use the choice board and make sure these activities are available to be done straight away
- place your choices on the choice board in the empty boxes
- ask the individual to choose an activity by moving a symbol into the black 'now' box at the top of the choice board
- give or take the individual to their chosen activity as soon as they have made a choice – it is important that they make a link between choosing a motivating activity and doing it
- some individuals do not point or their joint attention is at an early stage. For these individuals, taking the symbol in their hand to choose works better than pointing.
- when you have finished the chosen activity encourage the individual to place the symbol in the finished pocket

How to help the individual to use them:

- if the individual is not familiar with choice making start by introducing a two-choice board
- the options will usually be activities the individual likes so they are motivated to make the choice

When introducing a two-Choice Board an individual may:

- find it difficult to choose from two preferred activities. If so, the options can be changed to one preferred and one less preferred (less or non-preferred means the individual is neutral about the activity rather than that they dislike it).
- find it difficult to choose from symbols. If so, you could try using the real objects or photographs alongside the symbols to aid the individual's understanding.

You can increase the number of choices once the individual can confidently choose between two options.

When introducing or moving onto a four-Choice Board an individual may:

- find it difficult to choose from four preferred activities
- reduce options to three if the individual seems overwhelmed or unable to decide

Possible next steps:

- introduce a less familiar activity to enhance the individual's opportunities to try new activities/ experiences
- introduce different kinds of choices: snacks, activities, friends to be in their group
- choice making with 6 activities

Other Useful Guides:

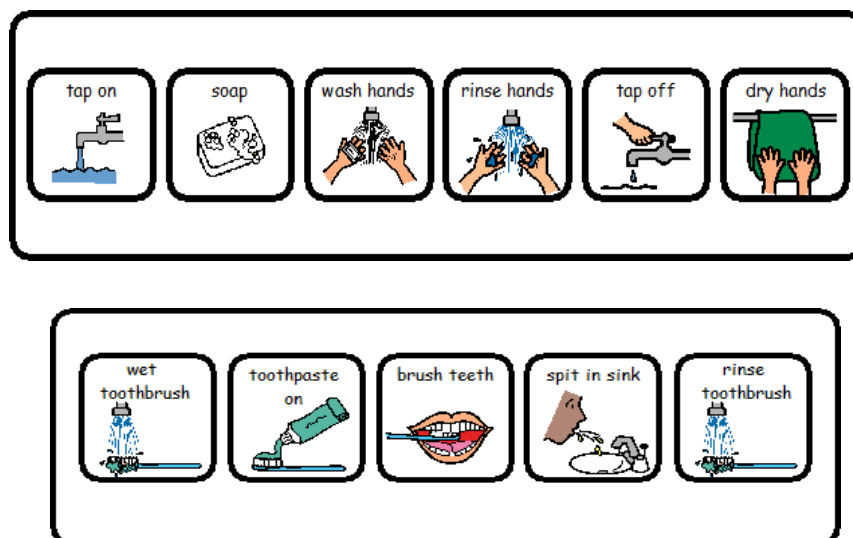
- ✓ Using Timers
- ✓ Using Visual Timetables with Symbols

21. Using Sequence Charts Using Symbols

What are Sequence Charts?

A sequence chart is a step-by-step guide that depicts each step of a routine or activity. They can help support individuals to follow a daily routine/ task, for example, washing hands or getting dressed, by breaking it down to individual steps.

Examples of Sequence Charts:



Why are Sequence Charts used?

- to aid an individual's understanding of a routine/ task
- to aid an individual's ability to follow a routine/ task by providing a visual reminder of each step
- to aid independence
- to foster confidence in being able to complete a task

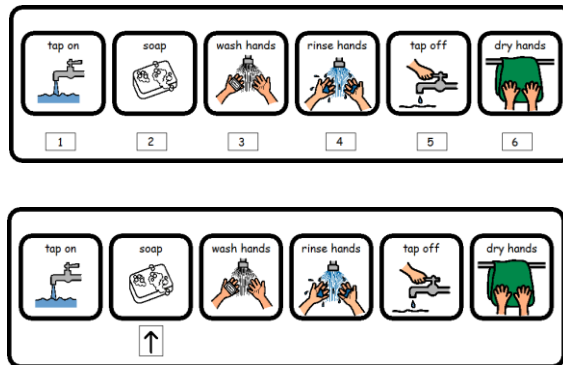
How to introduce Sequence Charts

- place the sequence chart close to where the activities take place, for example, above the sink to wash hands
- alternatively take it to where the activity takes place
- point to and name each depicted step as the individual is going through the stages

How to help the individual to use them

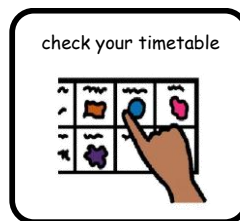
- gradually reduce your prompts as the individual becomes more familiar with using the sequence chart and as their understanding of the steps develop
- the individual's independence can be promoted by either:
 - adding a number to each step so the individual can keep track of each step

- adding an arrow which can be moved along each step as the sequence is completed. A piece of Velcro can be placed under each picture to attach the arrow to.



The latter options are particularly important for older children to respect privacy within dressing/ showering routines etc.

Check your timetable cards



You can support an individual to independently return to their timetable or sequence chart by using a check your timetable card. You can:

- place this on the wall or near the schedule
- or you could carry one in your pocket or on a keyring
- point to it, or show it to the individual
- say 'check your timetable'
- they may initially need a physical prompt to go back to the timetable and work out where they are in the sequence
- gradually reduce prompts

Possible next steps:

- sequence charts can be used to support a variety of activities/ tasks such as:
 - recipe books
 - preparing school bag

22. Using Home Communication Diaries with Photographs

What are Home Communication Diaries?

A home communication diary shows the activities an individual has been involved in at home or at nursery/ school. They can reflect some core activities, or all the activities done. The visual supports used to represent the activities can be objects of reference, photographs, symbols or written word only. The photograph diary also includes boxes for adding any additional key information to be shared as requested.

Examples of Home Communication Diaries with photographs:

Home to nursery diary		Date:	
brushing		feed	
story		eat	
cup			

Other info
(i.e. how I slept/ how I am feeling this morning)

Why are Home Communication Diaries used?

To support the sharing of information from school to home and vice-versa. They can act as a conversation prompt/ starter.

They are used to help an individual:

- share information between home and school
- recall activities
- develop social communication skills

How to introduce a Home Communication Diary:

- sit with the individual to complete the home communication diary
- discuss the activities done either at home or at nursery/ school
- typically discussing one activity at a time
- the individual can then either:
 - stamp the associated box
 - make a mark at the associated box
 - circle the associated box

- tick the associated box
- alternatively, the adult can tick the associated box

Format of Home Communication Diaries:

The home communication diaries can be stored in a folder.

How to help the individual to use them:

When introducing these the individual may:

- not show any interest
 - continue to create the routine of looking at it, you may need to persist until this becomes an accepted routine
 - think about the time of day – some children need a bit of ‘down time’ when they get home from school or nursery, so may react better a bit later in the evening or after tea
 - pick one item to talk about and then put the diary in a finished pocket, gradually build up tolerance and understanding about the diary
- find it difficult to recall activities done
 - you can prompt them by pointing to the relevant picture
- prefer to compartmentalise what happens at school and home
 - make sure there are no ‘consequences’ that happen at home because of behaviour at school and vice versa
 - help the child understand that you also see that home and school are different
 - keep the content of the diary positive
- discuss with the team and agree a consistent, predictable strategy to make discussing the diary a desirable activity (e.g. sharing the most desirable experiences)

Possible next steps:

- encourage the child to choose one of the activities that goes in the diary

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Home Communication Diaries with Symbols

23. Using Home Communication Diaries with Symbols

What are Home Communication Diaries?

A home communication diary shows the activities an individual has been involved in at home or at nursery/ school. They can reflect some core activities, or all the activities done. The visual supports used to represent the activities can be objects of reference, photographs, symbols or written word only. The home communication diary also includes boxes for adding any additional key information to be shared as requested.

Examples of Home Communication Diaries

The image shows two examples of home communication diaries. The first is a 'Nursery to home diary' with a grid of activities: choose, outside, snack, singing, story, work, and lunch. The second is a 'School - Home Diary' with a grid of activities: library, computer, task bag, project, maths and numeracy (2+3=5), reading, writing, golden time, assembly, buddy time, lunch, art, drama, music, PE, and story. Both diaries include a date field and a section for 'Other comments/ additional information...'.

Why are Home Communication Diaries used?

To support the sharing of information from school to home and vice-versa. They can act as a conversation prompt/ starter.

They are used to help an individual:

- share information between home and school
- recall activities
- develop social communication skills

How to introduce a Home Communication Diary:

- sit with the individual to complete the home communication diary
- discuss the activities done either at home or at nursery/ school
- typically discussing one activity at a time
- the individual can then either:
 - stamp the associated box
 - make a mark at the associated box
 - circle the associated box
 - tick the associated box
- alternatively, the adult can tick the associated box

Format of a Home Communication Diary:

The home communication diaries can be stored in a folder

How to help the individual to use them:

When introducing these the individual may:

- not show any interest
 - continue to create the routine of looking at it, you may need to persist until this becomes an accepted routine
 - think about the time of day – some children need a bit of ‘down time’ when they get home from school or nursery, so may react better a bit later in the evening or after tea
 - at first pick one item to talk about and then put the diary in a finished pocket, regardless of reaction (i.e. be consistent) gradually build up tolerance and understanding about the diary
- find it difficult to recall activities done
 - you can prompt them by pointing to the relevant symbol
- prefer to compartmentalise what happens at school and home
 - make sure there are no ‘consequences’ that happen at home because of behaviour at school and vice versa
 - help the child understand that you also see that home and school are different
 - keep the content of the diary positive
- discuss with the team and agree a consistent, predictable strategy to make discussing the diary a desirable activity (e.g. sharing the most desirable experiences)

Possible next steps:

- choosing an activity to share in the diary

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Using Home Communication Diaries with Symbols

24. Using Countdown Charts

What are Countdown Charts?

Countdown charts show an individual how long they have to wait for an activity or event to happen. This is usually something they are excited about. Here is an example:



Why are Countdown Charts used?

They are used to help an individual:

- understand when an event is going to happen
- begin to learn to wait for an event/ activity

How to introduce Countdown Charts:

- decide where best to display the chart
- decide on the number of days/ sleeps to be displayed on the chart for example, three, five or seven days
- gain the individual's attention
- show them the chart and say for example, Christmas will happen in five sleeps, tonight is sleep five
- then count out each sleep symbol whilst pointing to them
- refer to the chart the following day. Begin by removing the symbol under number five, place it in the finished pocket and say Christmas will happen in four days. Count out each sleep symbol whilst pointing to them.
- continue to refer to the chart each day until the event occurs, removing the relevant symbols etc.

How to help the individual to use them

When introducing countdown charts, the individual may still need to ask when the event is to happen

- you can refer back to the chart to support their understanding

Possible next steps:

- as the individual becomes familiar with the chart you can help them become more independent with using it

Other Useful Guides:

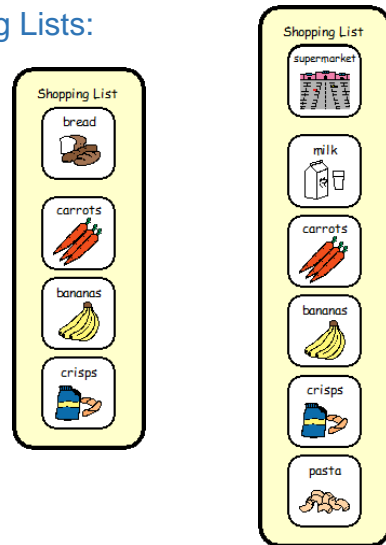
- ✓ Using Visual Timetables with Symbols
- ✓ Using Weekly/ Monthly Visual Timetables

25. Using Shopping List with Symbols

What are Shopping Lists?

A visual shopping list is used to show what is going to be purchased at the shop or supermarket. The list can be made using photographs or symbols.

Examples of Shopping Lists:



Why are Shopping Lists used?

They are used to help an individual:

- know what they are going to purchase from the shop
- focus on the task
- gain independence in the task
- feel calm and to enjoy a trip to the shops

How to introduce a Shopping List:

- gain the individuals attention
- just before you go to the shop, sit with the individual to discuss what is going to be purchased at the shop
- place the relevant symbol on the shopping list as you discuss it
- take the prepared shopping list with you to the shop/ supermarket
- when you arrive at the shop/ supermarket review what you are going to purchase
- either you or the individual can carry the list whilst in the shop
- remove each symbol as it is purchased. (You can add Velcro onto the back of the chart to store the symbols as they are removed from the list or place them in a small box.)

Format of Shopping List:

- presented as above
- on a key ring
- in a folder (can be more discrete)

How to help the individual to use them:

When introducing the shopping list, the individual may:

- require you to carry the list for them
- require you to refer to it and point to relevant picture
- require your support to find the item on the picture

Possible next steps. The individual can:

- carry the shopping list
- may like to also carry their own shopping basket
- become involved in selecting what is to be purchased at the shop
- move on from using photographs to symbols, symbols to written word (as appropriate).

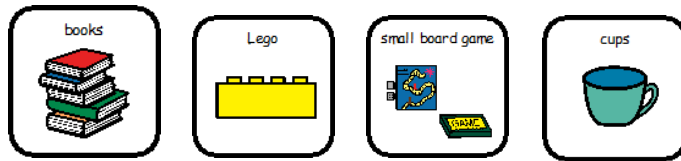
Other Useful Guides:

✓ Moving onto Using Photographs/ Symbols/ Written Words

26. Using Visual Labelling

What is visual labelling?

Visual labelling is used to show where things are located within the house e.g. cups, plates, clothes, toys, etc. The visual labels can be made using photographs or symbols.



Why is visual labelling used?

Visual labelling is used to signify where things are and where things belong.

They are used to help an individual:

- locate things
- know which things belong to them
- return things to the correct place
- develop independence
- transition between activities
- recognise the words on the symbol

How to introduce visual labelling

- display the visual labels clearly:
 - where the individual can see them
 - ensure no other pictures are displayed close by to limit distraction
- involve the individual in the displaying of the visual labels
- point to and refer to the symbols when asking the individual to find something or return something
- if using photographs take a photograph of the actual items

How to help the individual to use them

When first introducing them, the individual may:

- not look at them
 - keep trying as this is not unexpected. Refer to the symbols as appropriate.

Other Useful Guides:

✓ Moving onto Using Photographs/ Symbols/ Written Word Only

C. Conversational Partners

Different visual supports are used at different developmental stages. Broadly children develop understanding in the following order:

1. Real objects referring to the actual thing (e.g. their cup)
2. Real objects representing something (e.g. a cup representing snack time)
3. Photographs
4. Symbols
5. Written words

We have tried to organise the guides here, to assist those selecting and planning to use visual supports to be mindful of stage.

At the Conversational Partner level children:

- engage in conversations with others using sentences
- understand object signifiers, photos and symbols and may read written words
- might still only be at a 'here and now' stage or may be able to talk about the past and future
- are beginning to grasp or may have a good understanding of conceptual language (e.g. feelings)
- may prefer object, photos or written words for some visual supports and visual symbols for others
- may still have difficulties with aspects of understanding and using social communication
- may still have a need for desirability and predictability to participate independently in daily or social routines
- experience other challenges, which mean they become overwhelmed and in these circumstances, they may not be able to explain why they have behaved in a certain way

At Conversational Partner level we recommend the use of a range of visual supports

- all of the supports at language partner level continue to be relevant and can be used with conversational partners
- the written word can be used along with other visuals to support learning
- in particular at this stage, visual supports can be used to introduce desirability and predictability into day to day life
- additionally they can support social understanding and social communication
- parents using these at home could speak to professionals who know your child for further information

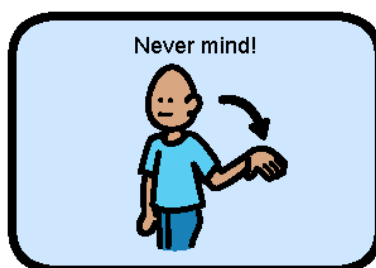
Examples of visual supports for Conversational Partners

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27. Never Mind Cards

What are Never Mind Cards?

These are cards, you can use when teaching an individual a strategy to manage disappointment, for example when losing in a game or having a disrupted expectation.



Why are Never Mind Cards used?

Never Mind Cards are used to express the concept that something isn't a big deal. A visual and concrete card can act as a reminder of the strategy, prompt the individual to say 'never mind' and give them something positive to do.

Younger children would not be expected to win and lose well. As children get older, there is an expectation that their reactions to disrupted expectations will get smaller and this can be hard for some young people. These cards are one way to help them to do this and to self regulate.

They are used to help an individual:

- feel in control
- have an independent strategy to respond to disappointment
- manage their outward emotions, so that the size of the reaction matches the size of the problem
- deal with winning and losing
- stay and play a game until the end
- play and interact with other people in a small group

How to introduce Never Mind Cards

- the individual will need time to learn what these are and how to use them, before they will be helpful when actually feeling strong emotions
- start teaching how to use these, in a structured and planned way, possibly in an activity where it is possible for them to say 'never mind'
- for example you could play games like noughts and crosses or snakes and ladders; have a stack of never mind cards on the table
- prepare them before the game by saying, someone will win and someone will lose this game. if we lose, we are going to try to take a 'never mind' card and say 'never mind'

- play the game and when you anticipate someone will lose, give a cue, e.g. say 'What will happen if I throw a 5?... I'll have to go down the snake.' or 'What will I do if I go down the snake?... take a never mind card.'
- Model e.g. 'Oh no I've gone down the snake, never mind!' (and take a card)

How to help the individual to use them

- practice in games as described above
- model using them yourself in different situations
- once the individual understands the idea, you can try using them in other situations (e.g. being late, not getting first in the line, not having your preferred crisps, etc...)
- you can carry a card in a pocket or a keyring
- prepare them, e.g. 'At the party they might not have your favourite crisps, if they don't it's ok. You can take a never mind card and say 'never mind'. We can get your favourite ones next time we go shopping.'

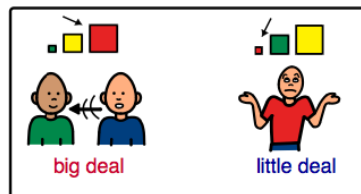
Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Big Deal Little Deal
- ✓ Help Cards

28. Big Deal Little Deal Cards

What are Big Deal Little Deal Cards?

For individuals who can understand abstract concepts and talk outwith the here and now, Big Deal Little Deal Cards are used to express the idea that something is either a big deal or a little deal.



These are cards you can use when teaching individuals to grade things that they experience. For example, if someone bumps into you by accident, that's a little deal. If someone punches you, that's a big deal.

Experiences do not fall neatly into two categories and there is always personal and social context, for example giving a vegetarian a beefburger for lunch would be a big deal but for someone who eats meat it is not. The noise of hand driers might be a big deal to some people because they have a sensitivity to some sounds and not a big deal to other people. These differences are all ok.

There are some judgements that are socially unexpected and if the individual sees something as a big deal when others don't, they may need a particular strategy to manage that experience when it arises.

These are complex ideas and require good language skills for problem solving.

Why are Big Deal Little Deal Cards used?

- Some individuals might have big reactions to 'little deals' for a range of reasons.
- As children get older, there is an expectation that their reactions to these will get smaller. To do this they need to learn to work out what is a big or little deal.
- Other individuals might find it hard to read social cues and context or may not ask for help. They might not tell people about 'big deals' and internalise their worries.
- Some individuals might misread your reaction and think they have had a big row, when you have just asked them to stop doing something.
- These cards are one way to help them to have strategies to deal with experiences and to use self or mutual regulation (helping themselves or asking others for help).
- A visual and concrete card can act as a conversation prompt, or a reminder to grade their experience and then support discussion about how to think about the experience.

They are used to help an individual:

- manage and interpret negative experiences or emotions
- have consistent words to express the size of a problem
- an independent strategy to grade the size of a problem they have experienced

- manage their outward emotions, so that the size of the reaction matches the size of the problem
- play and interact with other people
- talk about intentions of others
- ask for help with bullying or other big deals

How to introduce Big Deal Little Deal Cards

- Make sure they understand the concept of big and little before using it in this more abstract way
- Start with a sorting task to work out and agree what's a big deal or a little deal
- Begin with obvious things (e.g. a pet dies, someone steals your bike, someone punches you, you get a pink plate when you wanted the orange one, the cornflakes are finished, you can't find the remote control)
- If they insist something is a big deal when other people don't think it is, you can take a vote with a small group
- You could agree that for them it is a big deal but that this might be unexpected to other people and then work out a specific strategy to manage that concern
- You might want to make a poster or book to refer back to the things you have sorted

How to help the individual to use them

- After practising and sorting so that you are sure they understand the concept, carry the card with you
- Use the card 'in the moment' to talk about whether things are a big or little deal
- Don't just focus on one child, use it with others and to refer to your own experiences
- Model your own thought process, e.g. you could say, 'It felt like a really big deal when I couldn't find a parking space, then I realised it wasn't really and I'd find a space eventually.'
- Acknowledge that initially something might feel like a big deal but when you think about it it's not so big

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Never Mind Cards
- ✓ Help Cards
- ✓ Social Stories

29. Social Stories™

There are a range of visual supports recommended for conversational partners that have guidance and resources published by their authors. Helpful guidance can be found online. They may need to be made or written.

What are Social Stories™

These are stories which describe a particular social situation to increase understanding, increase predictability and reduce the experience of disrupted expectations.

They can be written by parents or family at home if they understand how to do so, or written in conjunction with professionals who know the individual well.

How do we use them?

Carol Gray is the creator of this approach and information is available about how to use them below:

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

30. Using an Emotions Keyring

What is this?

An Emotions Keyring can be used as a prompt and reminder to talk about the current 'zone' an individual is in when they are learning about [Zones of Regulation](#).

The key ring shows emotions that the individual understands on one side of each picture. On the reverse, are reminders of their personal strategies and things they can do when they have that emotion.

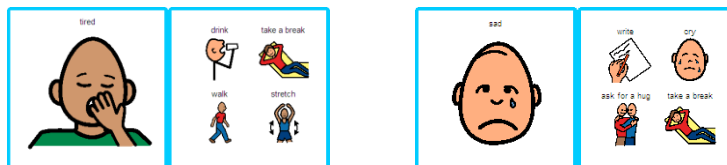
What is Zones of Regulation?

This is an approach, developed by Leah Kuypers.

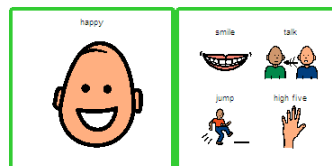
- It is used to support individuals to independently talk about feelings they understand
- It is used to support individuals to talk about and use self-regulation strategies

There are four zones which refer to different states of regulation:

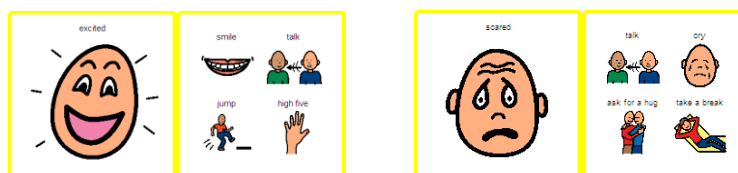
In the blue zone, we are under-active, in a state of low arousal or feeling sleepy or passive



In the green zone, we are well regulated, feeling good and ready to take part in activities on offer. We might want ideas to help stay in that zone



In the yellow zone we are beginning to feel a bit dysregulated, and for example we might feel excited or anxious



In the red zone we are in a heightened state and very dysregulated



The individual learning about 'zones' can learn to work out the signs that they are moving between zones, as well as strategies they can use at when they are in any zone. No zone is 'bad' or 'naughty' rather these are zones we can all be in at different times

Free downloadable visual supports and more information about this approach are available here <https://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>

How can I use the emotions keyring?

- Before using it, your child should understand the zones and be able to identify the kinds of feelings they have
- Then make a personal 'zones' toolkit, where you identify things the individual finds helpful in each zone. These can be things the individual can do and not things other people should do (this is a separate list for the adults)
- Print off the symbols and connect them together on a keyring that is portable
- Etc...

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Never Mind Cards

31. I need help cards

What is this?

These cards are a visual prop that an individual can use to pass a message to familiar people around them that they require help or are beginning to feel like they need to stop what they are doing. The cards provide a simple way of accessing help, without having to express the need verbally.

Why are these used?

Asking for help or asking to leave the current activity can be difficult for many individuals. They may have the language but feel unable to voice their needs. They may not realise they can ask for help or ask to leave or they may not trust that people will understand and listen to them.

At the point where they need to make such requests (e.g. when an individual becomes anxious or dysregulated) it is likely that their ability to express their feelings and needs will be further reduced.

Pointing to a card or picking up and placing a card near a key person is easier than speaking. By finding an alternative way to express their need, the individual might have a strategy to prevent them becoming more distressed.

How to introduce these cards:

- Decide which type of card you are going to try
- Print off and laminate the card (or several)
- Show it to the individual and tell them that they can use it any time they need
- You may wish to write a Social Story about how to use it and what will happen when they use it
- Practice using it at 'low stress' times and with a familiar person
- Other people in the family could also model using a similar card
- Make the card easily accessible (e.g. on the table, in their pocket, on the fridge)
- When they use the card spontaneously, try to be responsive and meet their need
- If you can see what the individual requires, you may not need to speak
- Limit the language you use (e.g. you could say 'how can I help?' or 'iPad, yes here it is')
- Don't question them

How to help the individual to use them:

- Make sure they are available
- If you see the individual might need a card and it's not there, place it near them

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Social Stories

32. Written daily or weekly schedules

What is this?

A written schedule is a list of things to happen that day or week. It allows an individual to see what needs to be done, in what order and can measure progress towards completion. The schedule represent the sequence of events about to happen and generally refers to a range of daily or social routines.

Depending on its purpose, it can be:

- handwritten or printed
- on paper, a white board or on a screen (e.g. phone or tablet)
- it can also be used with symbols as well as words
- written on to mark of completed activities

Schedules can be of varying lengths for example, they can set out the plan for part of the day or the whole day. There might be particular activities where an individual is becoming more independent, such as self-care routines, where a schedule supports independence and privacy.

Some schedules will just be a numbered list, others will have the time each thing will happen and/ or the people who will be there, depending on the individual need. For example:

Time	Activity	Finished
07:30	Get up	
07:40	Have Breakfast	
08:00	Shower and wash hair	
08:15	Come out of shower and get dressed	
08:25	Dry hair	
08:35	Brush teeth	
08:40	Coat on, pick up school bag and get in the car	

Why are these used?

Having a written list or schedule of upcoming events and tasks can provide structure and predictability. It can help remind individuals of what to do and supports independence. It can help individuals to be more organised and reduce the chances of forgetting something important.

How to introduce written schedules:

- first think about where it will be used and stored for easy access
- decide on the format (e.g. white board, paper, laminated card or screen)
- decide how they will mark completed activities (e.g. a sticker dot, a tick, drawing a line through, folding the paper etc..)
- make a plan for what will happen if there needs to be a change to the list (e.g. you planned to go to the park and it's raining)

- if it changes regularly, decide when you are going to plan it (e.g. do you write it every Sunday? the night before? or each morning?)
- give the schedule a relevant title (e.g. 'this morning', 'Monday', 'showering')
- prepare the list – the parent/ carer can initially write the list
- then you can often do this jointly with the individual or they can do it independently

How to help the individual to use them:

- Look at the list at the start of each day and read over the things planned
- Give them what they need to mark off the list as time passes if you have decided to do this (e.g. a pen)
- Some individuals will not need to or prefer not to discuss the list
- Some might want to discuss or write down any things they need to do the activities
- Some might want to talk about things they are looking forward to or things they are worried about
- Let the individual start the first activity. If they can complete the list independently, allow them to do this
- Some individuals will need a physical prompt (e.g. giving them the pen to mark off the first thing) for each step
- Some individuals may need a verbal prompt (e.g. you could say 'ok, that's finished, what's next on the list?')
- Gradually, the adults can reduce the prompts but observe how the individual is following the schedule and bring the schedule back to their attention if needed

33. Inside Thoughts Outside Thoughts

What are Inside Thoughts Outside Thoughts?

This is a way of thinking about how each person manages the thoughts that come into their head and how they decide which ones to speak out loud and which to keep inside.

Outside Thoughts



Having a visual framework to support the consideration of thoughts in terms of which you want to share and which you want to keep to yourself in a given situation can help some individuals to feel more confident in social situations and can support self regulation.

It is not always apparent that other people may also be having 'inside thoughts' and that their intentions may not be as literally stated.

Some individuals might think they are the only person who has negative or potentially unkind thoughts. It can be reassuring to know that everyone has them from time to time and that this doesn't make them an unkind person.

These are complex ideas and require good language skills for problem solving.


Why are Inside Thoughts Outside Thoughts used?

- Some individuals worry about saying the wrong thing or feel that they are always 'getting it wrong'. Knowing that you can choose whether or not to say something, and having a framework to support this decision, can be reassuring.
- Thinking about what to say 'in the moment' can be difficult and taking time to prepare what you might say can be helpful.
- Using the thoughts board to sort 'thoughts' provides a concrete way to think about an abstract process.
- It can be helpful to plan for times when having inside thoughts can be useful, e.g. choosing not to tell someone you don't like the picture they have drawn.
- It can be helpful to plan for times when having outside thoughts might be useful, e.g. asking for help or saying when you don't want to do something.
- Some individuals like to take time to consider and create a bank of alternative things to say in a range of situations, e.g. in response to, 'Do you like my jacket?' they might choose to say, 'Is it new? I've not seen it before.' Or 'I think you really suit that colour.' rather than, 'I don't like it.'
- Some individuals may not be aware that most other people have some thoughts in their head that they do not say out loud.

They are used to help an individual:

- reduce anxiety
- feel well regulated
- develop social understanding
- develop expressive communication
- feel more confident
- engage in motivating and positive social interaction with others

How to introduce Inside Outside Thoughts:

- prepare a 'head' with the words 'inside thoughts' in it
- write the words 'outside thoughts' in the space around the head
- prepare a bank of thought bubbles (can be found in Word shapes inserts) 
- prepare a simple scenario that won't cause anxiety, e.g. a peer is using the wrong equipment in a gym lesson.
- write some ideas of thoughts to match the scenario on the bubbles, e.g. 'ha ha, you got it wrong!' and 'I think that's maybe the wrong bat. Can I help you?' (leave some bubbles blank to think of ideas together).

How to help the individual to use them:

- practice with lots of 'safe' scenarios
- begin to talk about situations that might arise, e.g. someone pushes you in the playground, what could you say?
- use the framework in an anticipatory way, don't use for 'post match analysis' after things have gone awry
- model your own thought processes by using the words yourself in different situations, e.g. 'I thought about saying XXX but I stopped myself and said YYY
- model that it's okay to make mistakes, e.g. 'oops, I think that was in inside thought I just said'
- You might want to make a poster or book to refer back to the things you have discussed

Other Useful Guides:

- ✓ Never Mind Cards
- ✓ Help Cards
- ✓ Social Stories