

How to use visual supports to support your child at home

Why do we use visual supports?

Time is an abstract concept for some children and they struggle to know how long they are expected to wait for a second, minute or hour. This can lead to heightened anxiety, confusion and sometimes behavioural difficulties.

Most adults use visual cues to help organise their time, such as diaries and lists. Children like to know what is going to happen next as it gives them a sense of security and involves them in the planning process. Visual supports provide a concrete resource which can stay with the child and helps their understanding of what is expected of them and prepares them for the day ahead.

This type of visual information is clear and easy to understand and decreases the reliance on complex verbal language. A visual timetable can increase vocabulary, aid memory, reduce anxiety and reinforce routine.

What kind of visual supports can I use?

Real Objects

Use real objects and photographs to aid your child's understanding of activities, events and transitions, alongside spoken words. For example, show your child a cup to represent 'drink', a small empty snack tub to represent 'snack', car keys to represent 'car journey', a nappy/pad to represent 'change', a rubber duck to represent 'bathtime', lego people to represent 'family time'. Real objects are easier to understand than photographs or symbol cards.

When using items in this way, consistency is key! Present objects immediately before an event or activity. Use the same objects on every occasion. Use at every available opportunity. Keep them near to your child during the event it is representing.



Photographs

Photographs can also be very helpful in supporting your child's understanding. Photographs can be printed or viewed electronically (e.g. on your smartphone or tablet), to demonstrate key people, items, places, activities or events.

When taking photographs or selecting photographs from the internet, attempt to make the key item/person/activity the focus of the picture and avoid busy backgrounds.

Show your child photographs when telling him/her about what you are doing or will be doing. For example, when going to visit a family member, when you wish him/her to find his/her shoes, or to show him/her that you're going to visit the park. Make the most of your smartphone – you'll never be without visual supports!

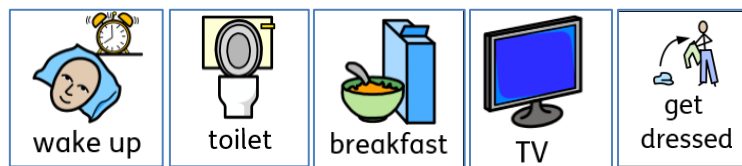
You can print photographs and keep them on a keyring so that you have them available when needed, or make them into an interesting photobook to share (use a scrapbook, notepad or an old photo album) and organize by topic (e.g. 'people I love', 'places I like to visit', 'foods I like', 'favourite toys').

Your child may also be able to make choices from photographs when offered. Use a choice of 2 photographs (one really motivating choice, the other less interesting) to begin teaching your child to make independent choices.

Visual Timetables

Visual timetables help children to understand routines throughout the day, reducing anxiety and preparing them for the day ahead. Using a visual timetable also helps you to recognise when something is changing and when something is different, and acts as a prompt to prepare your child for the change.

Here's an example of what a visual timetable may look like:



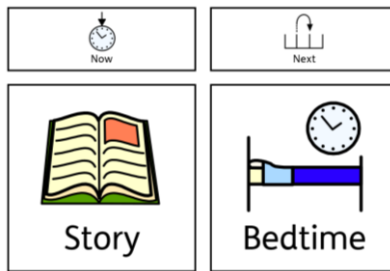
At the start of the day, talk through with your child what the plan is for that day. When your child has completed the activity, say "XX finished" and take the symbol of the timetable to visually show the child it is finished.

For fun activities, which you might want to limit (e.g. *you can play on the TV for 15 minutes, then it's time to get dressed*), or your child might find difficult to transition from (e.g. *one minute left of TV, then it's time to get dressed*), you can use timers. These are available on most smart phones.

It's always good to have a couple of spare symbols in case they get lost. It can also be a nice idea to have some blank symbols, where you can draw a simple line drawing for an unusual event or a change of plan.

Now/Next boards

Now and next boards are similar to visual timetables, but break the tasks down into smaller chunks, showing what is happening now and what is coming up next. This is often recommended for children who have shorter attention spans and need step by step directions. We would suggest you use the now/next board alongside a full visual timetable and remove the symbols from the visual timetable onto the now next board.



Task Strips



Task strips are used similarly to visual timetables, but are used to help the child with a specific task or process. These could be used for activities such as making a cup of tea, or washing their hands. The task breaks down the activity into smaller chunks and helps them to know the order to complete the task independently.

Social Stories

A Social Story™ describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format.

The goal of a Social Story™ is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience I.e. An explicit written (and/or pictorial) description of a behaviour.



Your child's Speech and Language Therapist or setting will help you create the social story. Read the story to your child often. For example, if your story is about an inset day, you might read it to your child after school, before bed, when they wake up and as you are getting them dressed in non-school uniform to prepare them for the change.


Makaton Signing


Many people make use of hand gestures as they speak. Makaton signing is used alongside speech to help the child to communicate with others and to increase their understanding of language. Signing whilst you speak can really help children with communication difficulties and is often a vital support system for children in their journey to effective language.



Below are some frequently used signs:




It Is Good To Wear Clean Clothes



 Having clean clothes looks good 

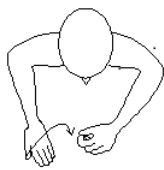


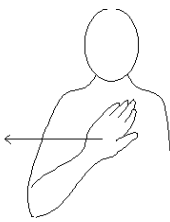
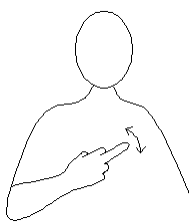



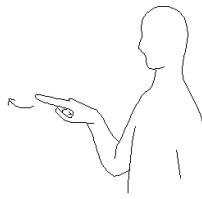
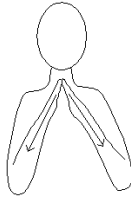




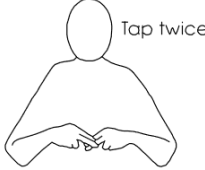
 Having clean clothes looks smart

 If my clothes get messy I can change my top 

 With a clean top I will look good again 

 Sometimes it is ok if clothes get messy 

  Most of the time it is best to have clean clothes

				
More	Finished	Stop	No	Toilet
				
School	Drink	Eat	Go	Home
				
Sleep	Play	Help	Mummy	Daddy

Where can I find support?

Your Speech and Language Therapist can advise you on which methods are best for your child and can support you implementing them into your home. If you know the name and contact details of your child's Speech and Language Therapist, you can contact them directly. Alternatively, you can email the team on hdft.speech.therapy@nhs.net.