

Visual supports are often used to communicate with people on the autism spectrum however they can be a useful tool to support all children. They are adaptable, portable and can be used in most situations.

Visual supports can help to provide structure and routine, encourage independence, build confidence, improve understanding, avoid frustration and anxiety, and provide opportunities to interact with others. They can make communication physical and consistent, rather than fleeting and inconsistent like spoken words can be.

## **Types of visual support**

A wide range of items can be used as visual supports. For example:

- tactile symbols/objects of reference, eg swimming trunks, packaging, food labels
- photographs
- short videos
- miniatures of real objects
- coloured pictures
- plain squares of coloured card
- line drawings
- symbols
- written words.

These can be real objects, printed images, or on a smartphone, tablet or computer.

## **Visual supports can be used in a range of ways:**

- as a single message, eg the person takes a yellow card from their pocket when they need to go to the toilet, or a puts purple card on the board when they're feeling stressed
- in combination to create a daily timetable, schedule, sequence or reward chart

- to make a choice, eg the person can put the trampolining symbol in the 'afternoon' area of the board
- to illustrate a social story or comic strip conversation.

### **Make visual supports portable, durable, easy to find, personalised and consistent:**

#### Portable:

- using a visual supports app on the person's tablet
- storing photos and pictures on the person's smartphone
- putting symbols, pictures and schedules in a folder for the person to carry with them.

#### Durable:

- Laminate printed visual supports.
- Back up any app, photos and pictures you use on a smartphone, tablet or computer.

#### Easy to find:

- placing them in prominent places at eye level
- putting them on an actual object
- putting a single symbol in the person's pocket
- distributing them throughout particular environments, eg objects and areas in the classroom and at home could be labelled
- putting a shortcut to them from a tablet home screen
- attaching symbols to boards so that people know where to go to look at them - you could also use Velcro strips to attach symbols to a board, meaning schedules can be easily altered, eg activities removed once completed.

#### Personalised:

Visual supports are very personal and what works for one person may not work for another. Use the person's special interest, eg a visual timetable could be made in the shape of a rocket.

Remember that some autistic people have difficulties generalising, eg they may not realise that a Hula Hoop packet symbolises all crisps.

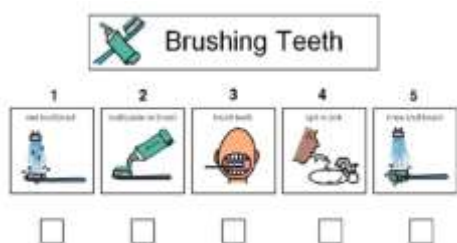
It can sometimes be helpful to use more than one type of visual support, but always introduce visual supports gradually. Start off with one symbol and then build up a collection.

Consistent:

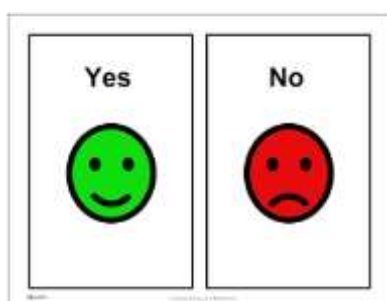
If using pictures, once you choose a type or style (for example, line drawings), use it consistently. Ask family members, friends, teachers or support workers to use the same visual supports consistently.

Examples of visual supports

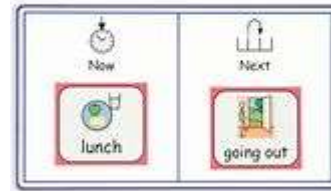
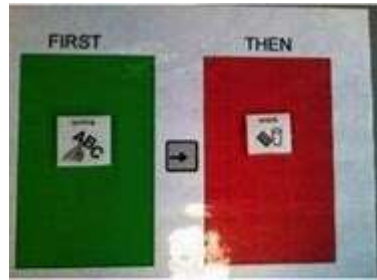
Visual routines / timetables:



Making choices:



Now and Next or First / Then boards:



Social stories:

Visuals to support emotional regulation:



5	Rage, Furious	
4	Angry, Mad	
3	Frustrated, Confused, Annoyed, Sad	
2	Nervous, Worried, Anxious	
1	Happy, Calm, Satisfied, Pleased, Okay	

