

General Visual Strategies

A visual support refers to using a picture or other visual item to communicate with a child who has difficulty understanding or using language. Visual supports can be photographs, drawings, objects, written words, or lists. Research has shown that visual supports work well to support children to communicate

Why use visual supports?

Words “disappear” right after we say them, visuals hold time and space.

Visuals direct attention to them and hold attention.

Visuals allow more time to process the information.

Visuals assist in remembering.

Visuals provide structure to an activity or task supporting the child to understand expectations

Types of visual supports

Objects, pictures, and symbols (later words)

Gestures (often best used when using other visuals or supporting simple language)

Arrangement of the environment or objects within the environment

Children may be using specific visual supports e.g., visual timetable to aid understanding and communication but here are some suggestions for general supports that can be used in day-to-day routines

Song choosing board or basket:

This can support children to make choices, understand and attention. Create a choosing board of pictures of songs or a basket of objects symbolising the songs that could be sung, consider limiting choice if a selection causes difficulty or even a choice of two. If you wish to only sing a song once remove the item or put it in the finished box when sang.

Story Visuals

It can be especially useful to have visually appealing props to focus children’s attention on the story. Choose items that highlight key points of the story or that will enable the story to be acted out by a scene. Visuals can also include key pictures or a board that maps out the key points of a story. You can also use props/ visuals for songs

Visual prompt cards

The use of symbols to support keywords in communication can be extremely useful alongside visual timetables to reinforce what is happening e.g., time for lunch/ group time. They can also be useful to communicate behavioural expectations e.g., a symbol for stop.

Room labelling:

To support the child to understand boundaries in the environment, accompany with simple language a gesture toward signs/ symbols e.g.

- Red stop signs on the door when outside is not accessible and green when it is
- Stop sign on switches that should not be touched or draws/ cupboards that should be closed

Carpet square, mat, or cushion

Supports children to know where to sit and the space that they have rather than sitting in an abstract space. It also gives a good visual prompt when a child moves, and it is not time to reduce the use of additional language. When presenting a child with a space to sit it can be a clever idea to offer a choice e.g., “red mat or green mat choose” supporting with clear over exaggerated gestures.

Sand timers

To support turn-taking, support a child to change activity & when they need prompting to engage in something different or when there is a change of routine. For these scenarios use simple language such as “when sand goes through finished, then...,” or “Harry’s turn/ time for...” (Put a sticker on one end of the sand timer so you know if it has been turned over)

Emotions Symbols

If a child has difficulty in understanding or identifying emotions pairing a simple symbol of that emotion when someone or the child is experiencing it can be supportive e.g., “Matthew is sad” (show symbol) if a child is more verbal it may sometimes be appropriate to also identify why that person is experiencing that emotion in simple terms e.g. ‘He hurt his knee/he fell over”



Useful References and Links

<https://www.widgit.com/products/widgit-online/index.htm>