VISUAL STRUCTURE

Visual support or structure is used for the following reasons:

- Words disappear after they are said and may be forgotten whereas visuals remain
- Visuals direct and hold the attention
- Visuals allow more time to process information and can be returned frequently
- Visuals help with remembering
- Visuals can be adapted to support the developing child 's profile
- They are often essential for these reasons and should be provided when needed and not removed – just as you would not remove an aid such as a pair of glasses
- The child 's involvement in how the visual structure looks and works are important

Examples of Visual Structure

Visual Timetable

These can be available for the whole class as an inclusive way of reminding everyone of the structure of the day. Some children may require this to be more explicit and personal in a way that is attractive and supportive of their needs. A daily schedule or timetable is one of the most important elements of a visual support system. It provides accurate information about what will happen and when. It can be amended to include information changes from the expected routine or any other important information.

The use of these timetables supports pupils to be able to 'see' and understand what is happening across the day, including being aware of any changes to routine, preparing the child and reducing anxiety. Sometimes an 'oops' card can be used which prepares the child for unforeseen events. The day can be divided into segments. For example – Register, circle time, literacy, break etc. Depending on the ability of the child consider using the following:

• objects of reference, photographs, line drawings or written words. Decide when and how the pupil will use it throughout the day
• Some pupils need to go back to it at transition points in the day to review what comes next
• Some pupils will want to remove segments as they are completed, in which case you need to have removable symbols. Once each activity has been completed it is then taken off the timetable and placed in the finished box/envelope. This will help the pupil to understand what activities have been completed and what s/he has left to do.
• For pupils who require a more sophisticated schedule or for those who tend to move cards around, a full-day schedule may be appropriate. This could be a one-page image of the timetable, presented in a format the child understands. As the pupil progresses through the day s/he crosses through each activity as they are completed, with support if necessary.

Visual planners/ Task Breakdowns

These can vary in design but are often used to help the child achieve a level of independence. They should clearly state what is expected of the child in a lesson, breaking the activity down into achievable chunks. They should be visible but for some children who would prefer not to feel different, they could be put into the front of a workbook.

First and then charts

A very simple chart which enables the order of activities to be decided. The adult should decide on the 'first' activity and the child should be able to choose the 'then' activity. A limited choice could be given to the child of two or three items.

Choice Board

A very simple chart enables the child to decide on their activity.

Sand timers

Sand timers can be used to support turn-taking as well as to help support a change of activity or a change in routine.

Bag time

This is simply a bag with 1 activity that you want the child to complete. It can be extended by adding more activities, but the child must always know how many activities you are expecting them to undertake. To involve the child 1-3 dice can be used so that they can help decide how many activities to complete.

Bag time can be used frequently during the day with different learning activities.

Individual Symbol prompts

Some children may need symbols to be shown to them discreetly to support them to follow the expectations for the class group e.g., the sitting symbol

Emotions Symbols

If a child has difficulty in identifying or understanding emotions, then using a simple symbol card to pair the emotion when the child or someone else might be feeling that emotion can be supportive e.g., Sam is sad (show symbol). If a child is more verbal, then it might be appropriate to say why the child is sad - 'Sam fell over.

Activity trays

Activity trays can be filled at the start of each lesson with different learning activities that the child is expected to complete.

In and out trays

A set of in and out trays can be placed in a work- station with the tasks to be completed in the tray. Once the work is completed it can be placed in the out tray.

Story visuals

Visually appealing prompts will help a child to engage with a story and maintain focus. Choose pictures that illustrate the key points of the story and help with the sequencing of events,

With all these visual structures, tasks need to be explicit so that the child is aware of an endpoint. Avoid asking them to read 1 more page when they think they have complete

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Useful References and Links

- Autism Toolbox: http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/
- AET: https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/
- National Autistic Society: https://www.autism.org.uk/