

Top Tips for Using Visual Aids

Visual aids can be used to help children understand spoken language as they provide extra visual clues. Visual aids can be particularly useful for children experiencing hearing and attention difficulties as well as difficulties understanding and using language.

Objects of Reference

Children find it easier to understand things that are happening in the here and now. It is also easier to understand language when it is supported with real life objects e.g. at snack time, showing the child a plate and/or cup as well as saying 'would you like snack?', 'snack time' etc. Using real objects makes it easier for the child as these provide visual representations of the word.



Choice Board

- A choice board contains pictures of a child's favourite items, such as toys and food and encourages them to communicate what they want by looking at, pointing to or saying the name of the picture they want.
- Pictures support language development because they are a visual representation of the word. Once a word is spoken it is gone, however a picture is permanent. Your child may be able to point to a picture on the board even if they can't see the object, to show you what they want.
- Start with offering the child a choice of 2 objects; select the corresponding pictures to place on the choice board. Offer the objects to the child and say the name of each item "bubbles or car?" The child may look at, point to or say the name of the item they want. When they make their choice, give them what they've asked for and model the name again e.g. "bubbles!" Adults can show the child how to point to their chosen item by pointing to the picture on the board.

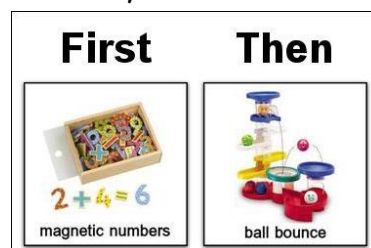
- Gradually increase the number of pictures (choices) on the child's choice board. You may need to add another Velcro strip or use smaller pictures to represent all of the possible options the child could choose. The adult can control what the child's choices are. It doesn't matter if you know what the child will choose every time or even if one of the choices is something they don't like.



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First and Then Board/Now and Next Board





- A 'First and Then board' (sometimes known as 'Now and Next') is a strategy that can be used to visually communicate instructions or expectations to a child. 'First and Then boards' can help alleviate anxiety related to transitions or changes in routines.
- The board consists of two sections; what the child is asked to do 'first' and then what the child can 'then' do once they have completed this activity. Both activities are represented visually either through the use of objects of reference, photos, pictures or symbols.



- Start by introducing two preferred activities, before moving on to a neutral/less preferred activity first and then a preferred activity. Show the child the 'First and Then board' and point to the pictures while giving the verbal instruction.
- If the child does not follow the instruction, redirect their attention to the 'First and Then board'.
- The child may initially resist following the expectation. It is important that the 'Then' activity not be given until the 'First' activity has occurred.
- If necessary, the expectation for the 'First' activity can be reduced e.g. one puzzle piece with assistance instead of the whole puzzle independently.

- Keep the 'First and Then board' visible to the child at all times. Some children need to check that the expectation is still the same.
- Using standard size boards with Velcro allows flexibility. Pictures can be changed as needed and the boards can be used in multiple locations. You could also draw pictures to represent the activities on a white board.
- 'First and Then boards' can also be used with children who ask repetitive questions or need constant reassurance about the routines.

Visual Timetable/Schedule

Circle Time	Outside Play	Snack Time	Home
			

- Visual timetables are photo/picture/symbol representations of daily routines.
- A visual schedule is not the same as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) which also uses small picture symbols. PECS is used for a child **to tell you** what they want (by giving you a picture). A visual schedule is for **you to tell the child** what will be happening.
- Timetables can be used in a portrait or landscape style on laminated paper/card with Velcro symbols that can be removed.
- When you first introduce a visual timetable to a child you will probably need to teach them how to use it. Do this by taking them to the timetable at each time of activity change. Help them to remove the symbol/picture for the completed task and place it in the finished box (whilst saying " _____ finished"). Then indicate the next item on the timetable, name it and take the child to the correct place to do it. The child will learn then what each symbol/picture means and how to use the timetable. Eventually they may use the 'finished' box independently.
- By using a visual timetable we are helping the child to become more independent and easier to direct. This will become increasingly important as they get older

and the school day becomes more structured (and less 'go and choose').
Introducing a visual timetable should therefore happen as early as possible in order to help the child when they are older.

- If your daily timetable includes periods where the child is free to choose what to do, represent this by having a 'choose' symbol on the visual timetable, e.g. a star (with 'choose' written underneath). This can be a good prompt for the child to go to their choice board/PECS folder to tell you what they want.

