



The Power of Visual Supports

Lots of people benefit from using visual strategies. Do **you** use a 'to do' list or a diary to write notes to yourself to help you remember? Then you use visual strategies. All students can benefit from having visual supports to help them remember and understand. But using visual supports can be particularly helpful for students with learning difficulties.

Visual tools and supports are things that we **see**. Body movements, environmental cues, pictures, objects and written language can all be used to support communication and understanding. Our environment is full of signs, logos, objects and other things that we can use for communication supports.

For many students with learning difficulties, the use of visually supported communication is more effective and efficient than just talking to them. Visual tools assist students in:

- Processing language
- Organizing their thinking
- Remembering information
- Following instructions

Some of the ways that they can be used in the classroom and at home are:

- To give children information about how to use materials and where things are kept.
- To sequence steps in order to complete an activity.
- To assist children to follow instructions independently.
- To promote appropriate social skills.
- To assist children in understanding the passage of time and sequence of activities.
- To assist children who have difficulty with transitions between activities.

The advantages of using visuals supports (pictorial cues)

- They can be used throughout life. We all use them (e.g. road signs, maps, lists, emoticons).
- They can be used without the teacher or parent present.
- They can support children who are working at various levels of independence and can be individualized for their level of need.
- They provide children with a visual road map of their day, helping them know what to expect, providing structure, relieving anxiety and reducing trouble with transitions.
- Pictures and words are both symbols for meanings and aid reading.
- Visuals are durable so children can refer to them after spoken words have been lost forever. Visuals serve as reminders of the verbal instruction.
- Visuals assist children in knowing exactly what is expected of them (e.g. washing hands before kai, unpacking school bag before school etc.).
- The level of visual support can easily be changed as the child's needs change over time.
- Visuals can be phased out once the child is able to follow the routine independently.

The use of visual schedules and visual strategies can make a significant difference in a student's ability to participate successfully in routines and learning at home and at school.

This handout has been developed by the Cross-Agency Learning Resource Project
Funded by the Wayne Francis Charitable Trust and the J R McKenzie Trust