

VISUALLY SUPPORTING COMMUNICATION FOR OLDER CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE



What is 'visual support'?

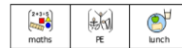


- Visual support is something that we can **see**.
- By using visual support, we can **prevent** or reduce the risk of **breakdowns in communication** – times that someone struggles to **understand** or **express** themselves or **engage in interaction** with other people.
- You don't have to have a speech, language, or communication difficulty to need to use visual support. **We all use visual support in day-to-day life:**
 - Body language, gestures, facial expression**- things that we can see that can give us **extra information** about **what someone means** and **how they might be feeling**
 - Signs in buildings, road signs, maps** – things that we can see that give us information about **where to go** or **what to do**
 - Recipes, instruction manuals, lists** – things that we can see that help us to **understand** and **remember what to do**
 - When abroad **pictures on signs/menus in a foreign language**- things that we can see that help us to **understand what is written** or **point to support us to communicate our needs or wishes**

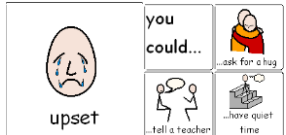


What is 'visual support' for communication difficulties?

Can include:



- visual timetables, task schedules, routine schedules** – things that we can see that help us to **understand** and **remember what to do**
- comic strip conversations, vocabulary mats, writing frames, communication boards/mat, emotion cards**- things that we can see that help us to **find** and **use the right words** and **express ourselves**





How do things we can SEE support communication?

- Visual support:**
 - ✓ Is **permanent**, it doesn't disappear like spoken words do. You can keep **checking back** at it.
 - ✓ Takes the **pressure off** our **memory**
- Visual support specifically for people with communication difficulties:**
 - ✓ Can provide **consistency** and **keep things simple**- the same pictures and words may be used each time the visual support is used which can make it easier to understand
 - ✓ When used in conversation can **slow the pace** down and make it easier for children and young people with communication difficulties **keep up** with and **process** what is being said
 - ✓ Can **reduce anxiety** about understanding- by supporting memory and understanding so people know **what is happening** and **what to expect**
 - ✓ Can **reduce anxiety** about expressing themselves- by supporting their ability to **communicate their needs**
 - ✓ Can **support independence** – using visual support may mean that a child or young person **doesn't need to rely on an adult** to repeat information and give them step by step instructions







Why consider older children & young people?

- Older children and young people can often **mask their communication difficulties**- it isn't always obvious that they need support to remember and understand what someone is saying or to help them to get their message across. 
- Older children and young people who have **trouble regulating their feelings** will experience times when they **struggle to access their language skills**- visual support can be very important at these times. 

However...

- Some older children and young people can consider some typical types of visual support as **childish**. 
- Symbol based task schedules, timetables, comprehension monitoring tools, vocabulary mats may end up **not being helpful** to an older child or young person if they decide it is aimed at a younger child.
- We can help older children and young people to see that we **all rely on forms of visual support** by highlighting what we as adults use in our day-to-day life. 







How can we make visual support more accessible and helpful for older CYP?

- ✓ Using things that are **readily available** and that we as adults **already use** (see below)
- ✓ Making the use of visual support **informal**:
 - ✗ – **don't** prepare visual support ahead of introducing it to the child or young person, instead **do it in the moment**, in front of them
 - ✗ **Don't** draw attention to it as a 'strategy' – **write and/or draw alongside your talking naturally**
 - ✓ Highlight how **helpful** it is for you- **disguise** it as a strategy that is more for **you**, use it with **everybody!**




What visual support is useful for older children & young people?

- Post-its as **visual timetables/task timetables**
- Post-its to support **comprehension monitoring**
- Handwritten lists and drawings (use scrap paper/white board pens on desks) to support **step by step instructions**
- Hand drawn **diagrams/flow charts** (use scrap paper/white board pens on desks) to support **explanations**
- Mind Maps** to support **expression & planning**
- Comic strip conversations- **hand drawn stick people with speech, thought and heart (feeling) bubbles** with no need for a template to **support story telling/getting their side of the story across**
- Emojis and symbols!** These are internationally recognised; even hand-drawn emojis may help to add meaning for a CYP, particularly when thinking about **emotions** 
- Hand drawn pictures to support **vocabulary** with hand-written definitions (could be on scrap paper/post-its/white board pen on a desks)
- Mobile phone:**
 - Setting **reminders**
 - Calendar**
 - Notes** function/app for making lists
 - Voice recorder**- (not visual but can be played over and over to support memory)

- Demonstration** – showing a young person how to do something (whatever the task) to make it meaningful 



Considerations

- Consider the young person's **literacy level** and make sure that written visual support is **appropriate** 
- Listen to the young person's **preferences**- try different types of visual support in different situations until you find something helpful
- Even though a young person may learn visually, they will still **need simple spoken, explanations** to support their learning

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