

Visual Supports for Autistic People

Why has Autism Accreditation created this booklet?

I THINK IN PICTURES. Words are like a second language to me...One of the most profound mysteries of autism has been the remarkable ability of most autistic people to excel at visual spatial skills while performing so poorly at verbal skills.

Temple Grandin

We all use visual supports in our daily lives to help organise ourselves and keep on task, whether it be a Smart phone App, a wall calendar or a hand-written shopping list. However visual supports may be particularly of value to autistic people, a number of studies and personal accounts suggesting that autistic people tend to be visual in their thinking.

Visual supports can be used as an alternative to or as a replacement for the spoken word. They are adaptable, portable and can be used in most situations.

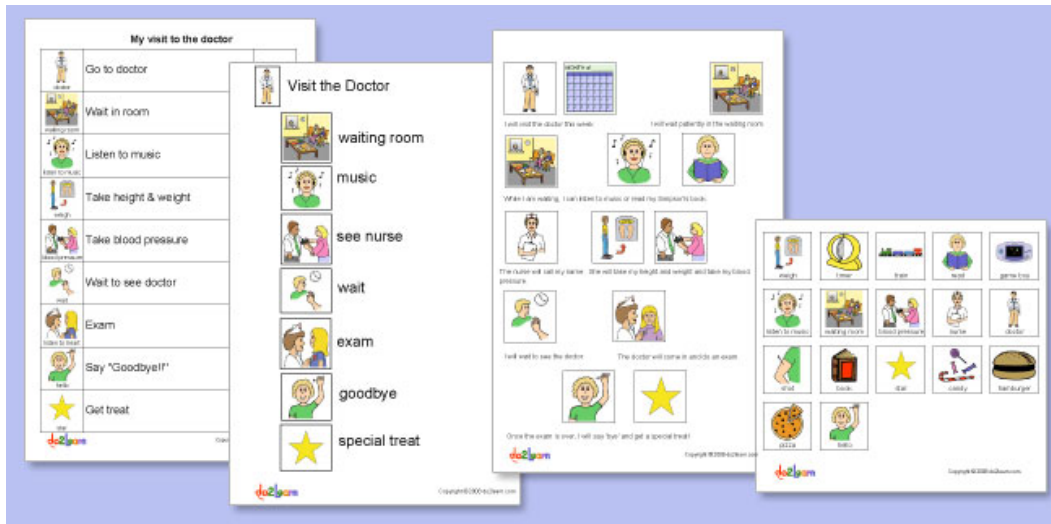
Visual supports can help to provide structure and routine, encourage independence, build confidence, improve understanding, avoid frustration and anxiety, and provide opportunities to interact with others. They can make communication physical and consistent, rather than fleeting and inconsistent like spoken words can be.

This booklet is largely based on information from the National Autistic Society which can be found here:

Visual Supports

To give you some ideas we have included some examples of visual supports and signposted you to resources that might be helpful. However, no one autistic person is the same and there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Indeed, visual supports are likely to be most effective the more they are personalised.

Types of Visual Supports



A wide range of items can be used as visual supports. For example:

- tactile symbols/objects of reference, eg swimming trunks, packaging, food labels
- photographs
- short videos
- miniatures of real objects
- coloured pictures
- plain squares of coloured card
- line drawings
- symbols
- written words.

These can be real objects, printed images, or on a smartphone, tablet or computer.

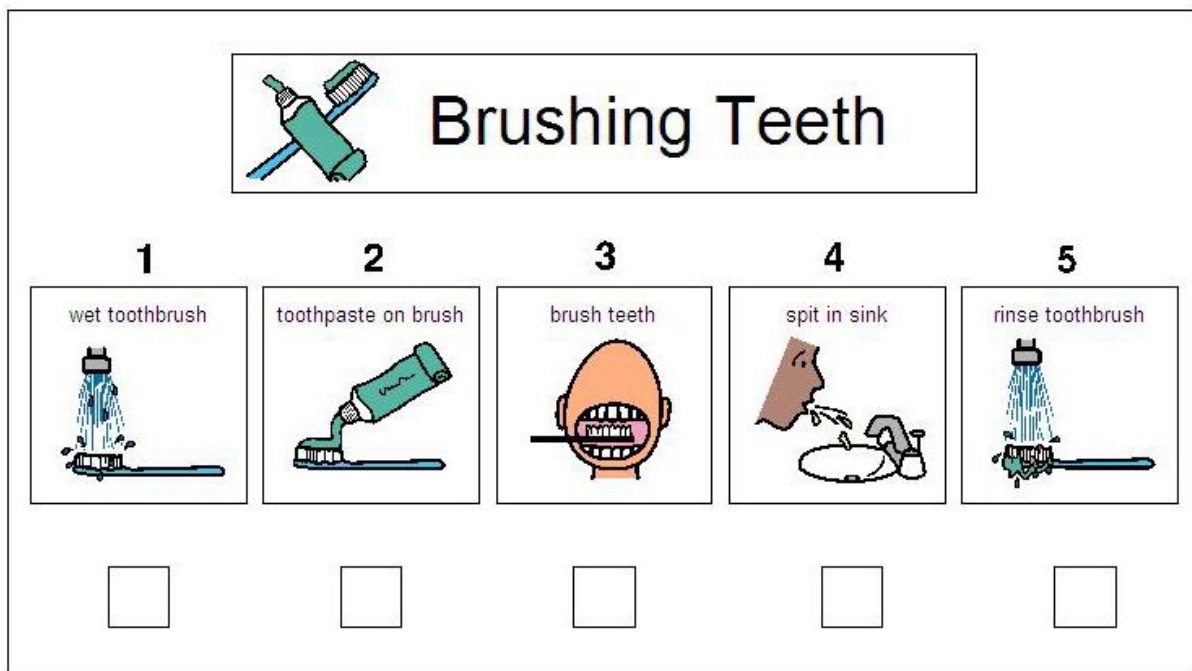
Uses of visual supports



Visual supports can be used in a range of ways, eg:

- as a single message, eg the person takes a yellow card from their pocket when they need to go to the toilet, or a puts purple card on the board when they're feeling stressed
- in combination to create a daily timetable, schedule, sequence or reward chart
- to make a choice, eg the person can put the trampolining symbol in the 'afternoon' area of the board
- to illustrate a social story or comic strip conversation

Top tips



Make visual supports portable, durable, easy to find, personalised and consistent.

Portable

Make the visual supports portable by:

- using a visual supports app on the person's tablet
- storing photos and pictures on the person's smartphone
- putting symbols, pictures and schedules in a folder for the person to carry with them.

Durable

- Laminate printed visual supports.

- Back up any app, photos and pictures you use on a smartphone, tablet or computer.

Easy to find

Ensure that visual supports are easy to find, for example by:

- placing them in prominent places at eye level
- putting them on an actual object
- putting a single symbol in the person's pocket
- distributing them throughout particular environments, eg objects and areas in the classroom and at home could be labelled
- putting a shortcut to them from a tablet home screen
- attaching symbols to boards so that people know where to go to look at them - you could also use Velcro strips to attach symbols to a board, meaning schedules can be easily altered, eg activities removed once completed.

Personalised

Visual supports are very personal and what works for one person may not work for another. Use the person's special interest, eg a visual timetable could be made in the shape of a rocket.

Remember that some autistic people have difficulties generalising, eg they may not realise that a Hula Hoop packet symbolises all crisps.

It can sometimes be helpful to use more than one type of visual support, but always introduce visual supports gradually. Start off with one symbol and then build up a collection.

Consistent


If using pictures, once you choose a type or style (for example, line drawings), use it consistently. Ask family members, friends, teachers or support workers to use the same visual supports consistently.

Examples of Visual Supports

Basic symbols to allow a person to express an opinion, eg by putting a thumbs down symbol next to that one of today's activities, to show they didn't enjoy it

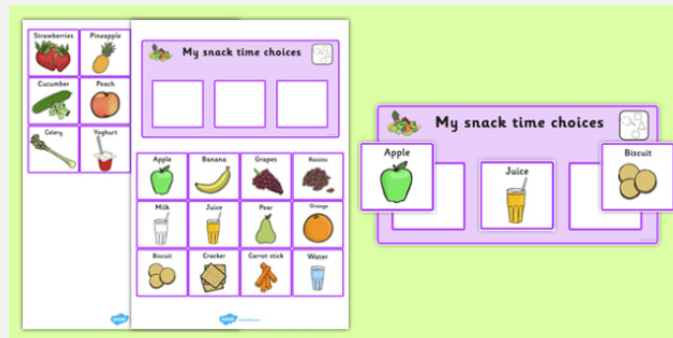


Calendars to prepare for activities outside of the usual routine, eg Christmas

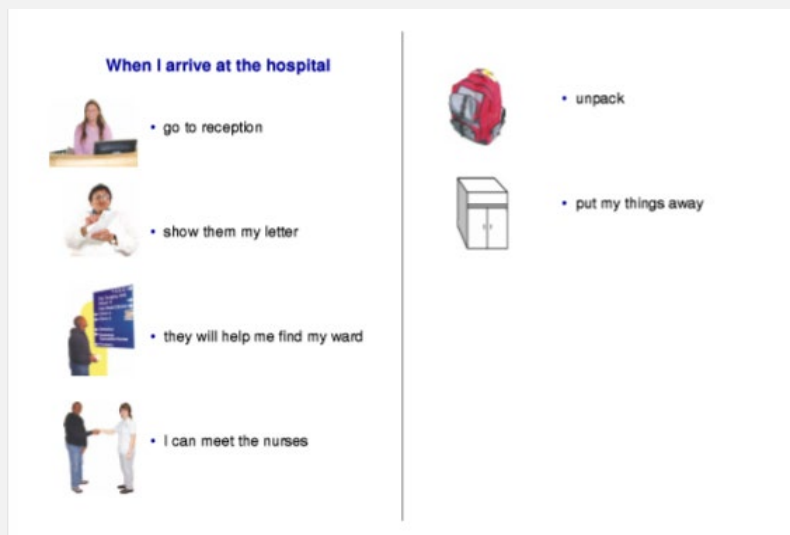
 February 2015

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|--------|---------------------|-----------|----------------|--|---------------------|--------|
| | | yesterday | today | tomorrow | | 1 |
| 2 | 3 School Dinner | 4 | 5 5:30 Gym | 6 Wear something RED School Dinner | 7 1:30 Swimming | 8 |
| 9 | 10 School Dinner | 11 | 12 5:30 Gym | 13 School Dinner | 14 1:30 Swimming | 15 |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 5:30 Gym | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| 23 | 24 School Dinner | 25 | 26 5:30 Gym | 27 School Dinner | 28 1:30 Swimming | |

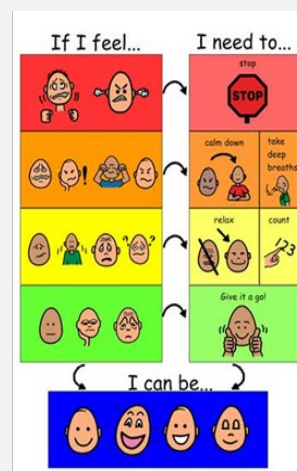
Choice Boards



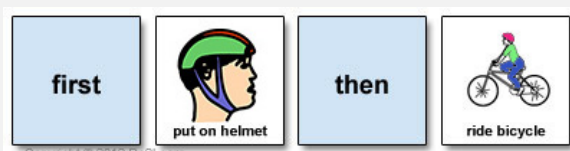
Easy read materials with visuals to aid understanding



Emotional thermometer



First...then sequences



Key phrase symbols

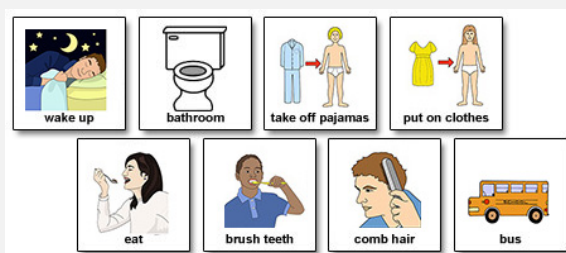
(eg 'I want',
'What's that?')



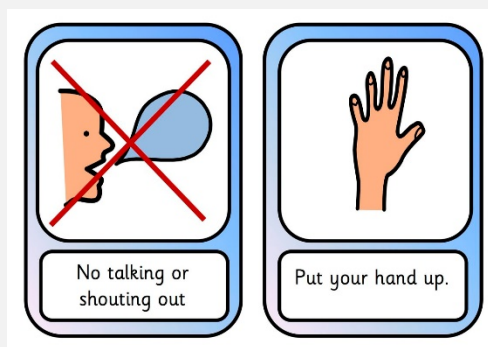
Labels for objects and storage



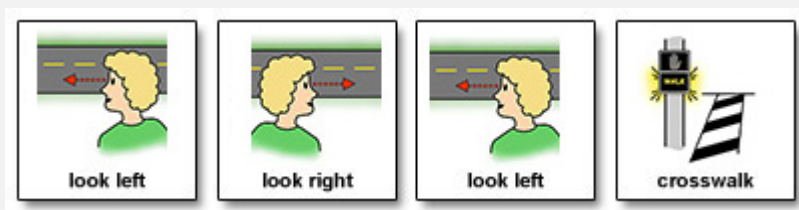
Morning Schedule



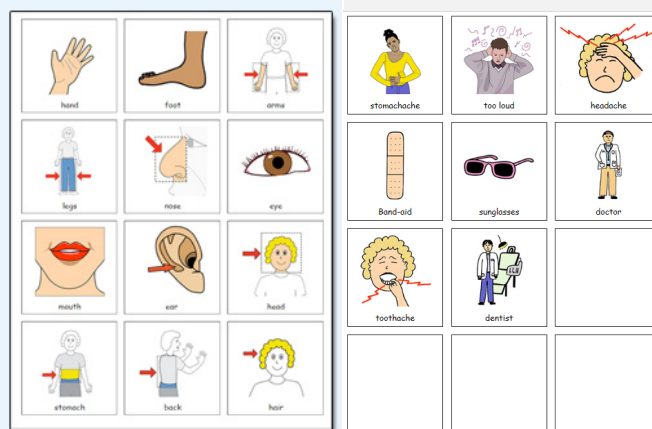
Behaviour instruction



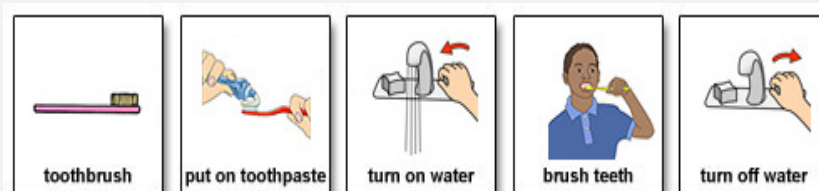
Safety guide



Health



Task sequence instruction strips for brushing teeth




Task Plan

Task Plan

| | | |
|-----------------|---------|---------|
| What do I need? | 1 | 4 |
| | 2 | 5 |
| | 3 | 6 |

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| What do I need to do? | |
| 1..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |



| | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Anything else? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | |
|--------|----------------------|---|
| Reward | How long? |  |
| | <input type="text"/> | |



Social Story using visuals

Being Wrong




theautismhelpers.com



Sometimes at school, I get a wrong answer.



When I get a wrong answer, I feel mad and frustrated.

I want to tear up my paper or stop working. But it's okay to get a wrong answer. Everyone gets a wrong answer sometimes.

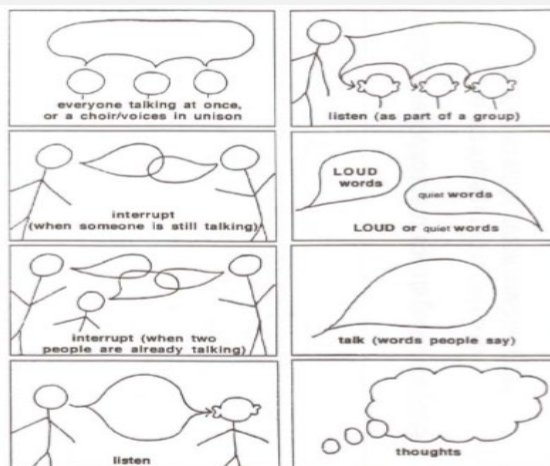
I can say "bummer" or "oh well." Maybe I will get a right answer next time. It's no big deal.

I keep working and soon I will get a right answer and feel happy.

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Comic Script Conversations



Gray, C. (1994). *Comic Strip Conversations*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Find resources

You can make, download or buy printed pictures, or you can use an app.

[ASD Visual Aids](#)

[Autism app reviews](#)

[Books Beyond Words story app](#)

[Colour coding for learners with autism](#), Adele Devine

[Colourful semantics](#)

[Do2learn](#)

[Tom Tag versatile picture schedules](#)

[Go talk now](#)

[Makaton](#)

[Microsoft Word](#)

[PECS – Picture Exchange Communication System](#)

[Symbol world](#)

[The Internet Picture Dictionary](#)

[Therapy box](#)

[Tom Orr Accessibility by Design](#)

[Visual Autism Resources](#)

[Widget](#)

[Widget Health](#)

[The Play Doctors](#)

More information

[Communication tips](#)

[Research Autism's evaluation of PECS](#)

[Social stories and comic strip conversations](#)

[Using technology](#)

[Visual supports for people with autism: a guide for parents and professionals,](#)
Marlene Cohen and Peter Gerhardt,

[Making Visual Supports Work in the Community/](#)

Jennifer L. Savner and Brenda Smith Myles

[Visual Supports for Visual Thinkers](#)

Lisa Rodgers

[Learning through seeing and doing](#)

Shelia Rao and Brenda Gaige

[Visual support for children with autism spectrum disorders](#)

Vera Bernard-Opitz and Anne Häussler