



Why and How to Use Visuals

Why:

- Most children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have strengths in visual areas compared to other areas.
- Up to 80% of families have their child's (with ASD) hearing test first because of delays in language development. Children with ASD can hear but they can't process verbal language.
- A symbol or picture remains constant long after the word or sign has been completed.
- People with ASD tell us language is confusing. Temple Grandin, a well-known American with ASD reports "I think in pictures."
- Sensory processing difficulties are part of ASD so it makes sense to support one sensory input system (i.e. hearing) with another – sight.

How:

- Visuals include: real objects, parts of objects or remnants (e.g. empty packet of sultanas); photographs of the actual object, photographs of similar objects, drawings, computer generated symbols, (e.g. Boardmaker, Pics for PECS symbols) and words. Even the McDonalds' golden arches are a visual, and one that every child seems to know!
- Your child's age and ability will be the determining factor when deciding what type of visual support to use. Generally very young children and those who have additional difficulties need visuals that most closely resemble the actual object. These children may respond best when you show them the car keys rather than a Boardmaker symbol of a car. It is easier to use photos or symbols than carry round bags of objects. However, if they don't have meaning for your child at this point remnants or objects are fine.
- Always couple visuals with speech. They are an aid to help you understand spoken language, not a substitute.
- Be eclectic. You do not need to only use one type of visual. You can still use objects even if your child recognises symbols.
- Always print the name of the visual at the top. This will ensure that everyone calls the object the same thing (is it a mug or a cup?) and as words are only another visual code your child might crack this code as well!
- To be valuable visuals must be accessible. Keep them near where you are likely to use them – on the fridge or somewhere else handy in the kitchen; in the toilet; near the front door etc. Put a few key symbols on your key ring (finish, toilet, car, home, etc.).
- Wait! Like all communication you need to allow the child time to process and point.
- Persevere. Your child may need many trials before he makes the connection between the visual and the real object.
- Speak to your speech pathologist about introducing your child to PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System).

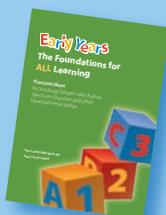
Remember:

- Visuals need to be paired with looking at the other person to be useful communication.
- All visuals should be accompanied by speech.
- Keep visuals in place even after your child has learnt to talk.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The Early Years: Foundations for All Learning

By Sue Larkey and Gay von Ess



Practical Communication Programmes

By Jo Adkins and Sue Larkey



Pics for PECS

CD contains over 2000 icons

