

Supporting Communication - Visuals

Talking does not just involve speaking. When we watch others talk, you will see people using words but also gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, body language and often, even the use of additional tools such as visuals. All of these are a form of communication.

How can visuals help?

Many children will develop understanding before the use of language, which will leave them feeling frustrated as they may know what they want to communicate but are unable to express it.

When we talk, the words we say are abstract and disappear! Visual supports last longer; they provide something more concrete to aid understanding. When we use visual support at the same time as talking, we give children extra time to understand, prepare for change, and think about how to respond. Visual supports can also help children communicate; visuals encourage a child's expressive language when spoken language is consistently paired with a symbol (Miller, Light and Schlosser, 2006)

Using visuals can help our kids:

- Become more independent
- Adapt to changes in routine
- Reduce anxiety
- Follow instructions
- Learn the sequence of a new task e.g. independently brushing their teeth
- Transition to another task
- Learn new words

Understanding visuals

- Visuals are all around us and we rely on them as adults every day. They can be in the form of signs, text, photo's, drawings, gestures, logos. We have learnt to immediately recognise these symbols and associate meaning according to our past experience and exposure to the symbol/visual. Similarly, our children learn to identify and relate to visuals and symbols through exposure and experiences.
- Sometimes a variety of visual types may be used e.g. Makaton, objects, photos, symbols for objects and actions
- Sometimes families worry that using visuals will make the child "lazy" and it may hinder their spoken language development. Research shows us that visual supports actually increase a child's language output when verbal language is consistently paired with the




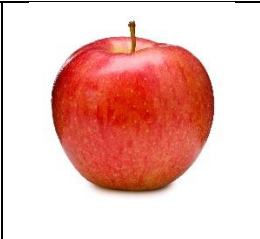
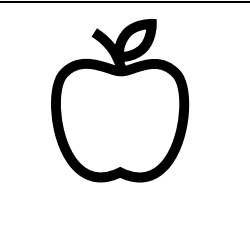
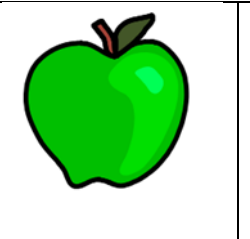
visual/symbol. Research reported* as a result of AAC/Visual interventions language production increased on 89% of occasions.

Top Tips when using visuals

- **Teach symbol/visual recognition** - Just like learning new vocabulary our children need exposure and repetition to learn the meaning of visuals.
- **Be consistent** – It is important as adults that we are consistent with the visuals that we are using throughout the day and at the level of our child. Consistency is key! Remember, 90% of use is the adult modelling, 10% is often then the child engaging, understanding and potentially using.
- **Pair with verbal models** – Make sure you model your words alongside any visual that you are using with your child.
- **Make visuals readily available**

Hierarchy of Visuals

As demonstrated below, there are a variety of visuals which range from concrete (e.g., real life object) to abstract (e.g., symbols or words). Some visuals are more immediately recognisable (i.e., more iconicity), while others require interpretation (i.e., less iconicity). Some children will use one particular type of visual, while other children may benefit from the use a mixture of visuals to support their understanding.

				Apple
Real life object	Photograph	Line drawing	Symbol	Written word

Concrete
→
 Abstract