

STARS – Strategies Tips and Resources for Schools

Visual Supports

STARS is a resource created to save you time and includes strategies, tips, methods and practical advice for supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

This resource provides adaptable advice for both Primary and Secondary settings, catering to the needs of your school and students.

Visual Supports

Visual Supports are beneficial for anyone with receptive or expressive language delays. Using visual supports makes it easier to process information. Supports can be pictures, objects, sign language or text and they can come in a variety of forms.

Visual supports can help to:

- Provide structure and routine.
- Avoid anxiety and frustration.
- Give clear expectations.
- Provide and support social interactions.
- Encourage independence.
- Support working memory.
- Develop language and vocabulary skills.

Hierarchy for Visual Supports:

1. Real objects (Object of Reference)
2. Photographs
3. Symbols and words
4. Written word



Concrete – Easiest to understand.




Most Abstract – Harder to Understand

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Types of Visuals and How to Implement them:

As with many SEND strategies it isn't a one size fits all and there can be many ways to present visual supports. Here are some of the different types of visual supports that can be used, examples of what they can look like and how to implement them within the classroom. With all these visuals, it's important to remember that they travel with the child to aid with transitions and understanding.

Type of Visual	Example	How to Implement
Objects of Reference		Objects of reference can be used with early communicators who don't understand pictures or symbols yet. A physical object alongside a picture or symbol can help the child understand what is happening next or help them to make a choice. The object of reference should be the same each time and be presented before the transition. To support choice making, two objects can be offered encouraging your learner to make a choice, this can be non-verbal (i.e pointing, or reaching for one object)
Lanyard Symbols		A lanyard with key prompts tailored to the learner could include key vocabulary, behaviour prompts or learning areas. The symbols can be used by the adult or learner throughout the day to support understanding verbal instructions.
Red/Amber/Green		Coloured cards can be used on your lanyard or on a learner's desk to help support their understanding of language or transitions. Colours can mean: Green – go/carry on. Amber – waiting/nearly finished. Red – Stop/Finished It's important to keep the language consistent so choose your key word for each colour and use this every time.

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Visual Supports

Visual Timetable



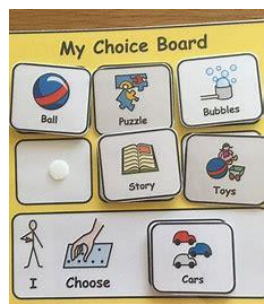
A visual timetable could be implemented for an individual or presented for the whole class to follow. It will outline what is going to happen throughout the day and the visuals should be taken down or crossed off as the activities happen, to show they have finished.

Now/Next Board



A 'Now/Next' board should be used throughout the day, displaying clear expectations of what is happening 'now' and 'next'. It should be implemented with the learner, so they are engaged and are aware of the expectations. Initially the 'now' task will be adult led with the 'next' activity being highly motivating/a reward.

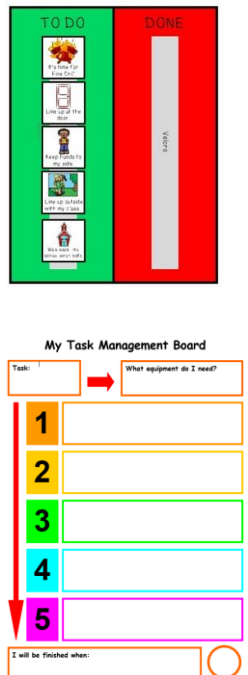
Choice Board



A choice board can be implemented in a variety of situations e.g., snack or choice/busy time. This can be used in different areas of the classroom to help the learner express their wants or structure a child's session by limiting their choices.

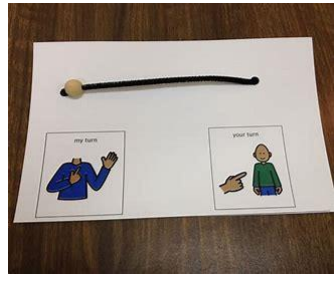
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Task Schedule



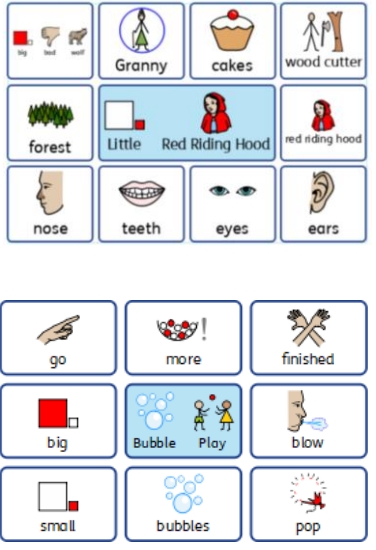
A task schedule can help learners follow a sequence of steps to complete a task. It breaks down the task into smaller steps for the learner to follow and helps them to remember the task order. This could be a work task, hygiene routine, creative activity etc.

Turn-Taking Boards



Turn-taking boards help children understand the concept of who's turn it is and when they will get their turn. With two players you can use a simple 'my turn - your turn' board.

Word banks





Word banks can be used in a variety of ways across the day. The aim to provide key vocabulary around a particular topic to support the learner in expressing their views/wants.

Word banks could be use for story/topic vocabulary or for games to promote the use of language/communication.

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<p>Count down strip</p>		<p>Count down strips can be used with pictures or numbers. They represent an activity ending.</p> <p>For non-preferred activities, learners may feel like the task will not end and refuse to engage. Count down strips allow students to visually see that there is an end point.</p> <p>For preferred activities, they can help you set limits on how long they've got left on the activity.</p>
<p>Visual timers</p>		<p>Visual timers can be used throughout the day in a variety of situations. They can support learners in knowing when an activity is coming to an end or a transition is happening.</p> <p>Make sure that you refer to the visual timer and give clear expectations of what is happening once it had ended. You may want to refer to the timer when it is close to ending to further prepare the learner.</p>

Tips for Implementing Visual Supports

- Be consistent – choose symbols or pictures. Ensure that they are consistent across the classroom with all staff aware of how and when they are used.
- Decide what you are using them for – is this to structure the day, structure a task, help with expressive language?
- Model how to use the visual – visuals can help a child become more independent with tasks, but they need to be shown how to use them first.
- Begin with simple visuals and introduce one at a time.
- Reinforce and use the visuals consistently through the day/task.
- They may not have an immediate effect as the learner needs to understand and be taught how to use them, it is important to give the child time to practice and embed the skills.
- Make visuals portable – visuals could be in a small folder, which can be easily always accessed.
- Make visuals durable – if you are making physical symbols laminate them so they last and back up any specific pictures on a device.

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Useful Links

[Speech and Language Therapy Archives - Integrated Treatment Services](#)

[Widgit Software | Widgit Symbols Help Communication](#)

[Home - Pyramid Educational Consultants UK \(pecs-unitedkingdom.com\)](#)

[Free resources \(makaton.org\)](#)

[Twinkl Symbols for AAC - Communication Pictures, Software & Resources](#)