

Visual Communication Environments

Visual communication systems help individuals to understand their day and to express their needs more effectively.

There are several visual systems which can be introduced and used by speech and language therapists with both children and adults who are experiencing difficulties understanding their daily routines and expressing their needs throughout the day.

What are Visual Communication Environments?

Visual communication environments can include:

- visual timetables;
- now/next boards;
- first/then boards;
- choice boards;
- key ring symbol system;
- recordable cards;
- objects of reference.

What are visual timetables?

Visual timetables enable the individual to track what is going to be happening across a morning, an afternoon or the whole day. They help to create structure, reduce confusion and anxiety and also outline what demands are being placed on them throughout the day.

For those individuals who do not cope well with change a visual timetable will help an individual adapt to the demands of the day.

What are now/next boards and first/then boards?

These boards are used for individuals who need a greater level of breakdown, so that they can focus on one task at a time without being overwhelmed. When using a now/next board, the now tends to be a work activity/demanding activity and the next is usually a reward/motivator. Gradually individuals will be able to move onto a longer visual timetable.

What are choice boards?

These are usually used when offering a motivator or when wanting to engage an individual in choice making. You may find an individual can only cope with 2 choices to start with. Therefore, these choices would be presented on either side of a choice board top left,

bottom right – this will ensure they are visually scanning all the choices and will enable them to start to make a choice of 4 and gradually six, eight and so forth.

What are key ring symbols?

These systems enable the individual to be more mobile with their visual communication system. They are often worn by care support workers, teaching assistants and parents to ensure the symbols are readily available to the individual to trigger their motivation to request something which they would like – e.g. a symbol of a drink on a key fob. They may also be used to aid the individuals level of understanding – showing a symbol of wash hands, prior to lunch.

What are recordable cards?

Audio cards form a great visual and auditory communication system. These [cards](#) enable the individual to follow an audio instruction and a visual prompt. They also help those individuals who benefit from hearing a speech model to copy the word or retain the word.



Why use Visual Communication Environments?

There are a range of benefits to using this approach, including (but not limited to) aiding individuals to:

- make choices of activities;
- follow a sequence of activities;
- be independent in their community;
- have a visual resource to aid memory.

There are many reasons why visual communication systems may be useful to each individual. It is extremely important to understand the individuals motivators and indeed their priorities to communicate.

Who can benefit from Visual Communication Environments?

Visual communication systems are used by individuals with a variety of needs, including:

- Learning Disability;
- Cerebral Palsy;
- Down Syndrome;
- Rett Syndrome;
- Autistic Spectrum Conditions;
- Rare Syndromes;
- Stroke or Traumatic Brain Injury;

- Degenerative diseases, including Huntington's disease, Dementia, Parkinson's disease and Motor Neurone Disease;
- Head/Neck Cancer;
- Language impairment;
- Multi sensory impairment;
- Physical disabilities.

Who can deliver Visual Communication Environments?

This approach can be used by all those in contact with individuals who have a range of needs.

Evidence for Visual Communication Environments

There are limited studies which explore the use of visual strategies as a single technique, although there are some studies reporting the positive effects of a range of visual strategies.

References

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