



## **The Communication Environment – How to create structure at home**

### **What is a ‘Structured Communication Environment?’**

This means that we arrange the environment in such a way that the child understands where they need to be and what they need to do without too many verbal instructions.

### **Visual Schedules**

Objects, photographs, pictures, drawings and symbols can be used to help children to understand what is going to happen in the day.

Visual schedules, if used regularly, can help:

- ✓ children to child see that they will get a chance to do their favourite activity later on
- ✓ anxious children to see and understand how many events there are until they get to do their favourite activity.
- ✓ children to remember what they did that day
- ✓ children to make choices about what they want to do
- ✓ children predict what might happen next

A visual schedule can be:

- A written list of activities that the child crosses off throughout the day
- Objects, photographs or symbols stuck on the wall – the child can remove these when the activity is finished and place them in a “finished” box

### **How do I use a visual schedule at home?**

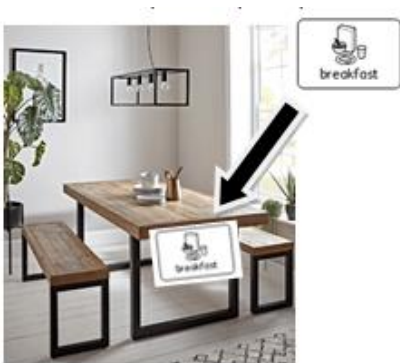
- 1) The Visual Schedule is the point from where all activities start
- 2) It is usually placed in a transition area in a neutral space and easily accessible to the child
- 3) It shows children where they are expected to be, what they are expected to do (in a broad sense) and what will happen next
- 4) You can use words and symbols, words and photographs or objects
- 5) Keep symbols organised in a ring binder in categories
- 6) Have two pictures of child. Fix one permanently at the top of the Visual Schedule. Adults give picture to child to prompt them to look at the timetable. The child will match it at the top.
- 7) The child takes each symbol off in turn, take it to the activity and match the corresponding symbol at the activity (see below)
- 8) When activity finished place symbol in finished bag



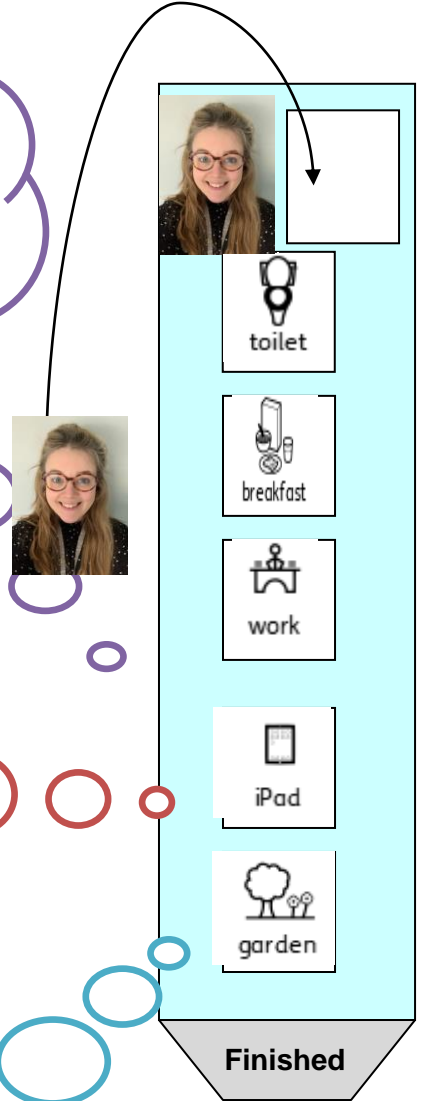
Make sure you refer back to the schedule throughout the day and that your child ticks off/crosses off/removes the symbols/ objects as they go, so that they understand what they are going to do next.



You can make some permanent pictures or symbols of common activities, or take photos of the activities. Mount the pictures onto card or laminate them so you can re-use them.



You can make a long strip of plastic pockets to contain the days activities, and insert the correct symbols in order. Alternatively, you can stick velcro to the back of each symbol and stick them onto a strip of card that also has velcro on.




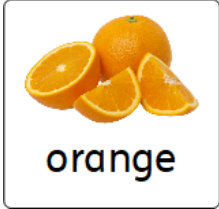




**A Note on Symbols**

The type of symbols you use depends on the ability of the child.

Below is a list of types of symbols

**Note: Please contact your class teacher/ Speech and Language Therapist for visuals for your child. This will ensure visuals you use at home are consistent with those used in school.**

Always write the word on the symbol or objects of reference so that all adults call it the same thing		
Symbol	Example	Ability level appropriate for
Object of Reference (OOR) 	Use an object to stand for the activity, e.g. use a toilet roll to stand for going to the toilet.  The objects can be free standing or stuck on a card.	OOR are appropriate for children who are not able understand that photographs and pictures stand for the object or activity. These children usually can't match pictures or objects easily.
Photograph and word 	Take a very clear photo of the object or an aspect of the activity. There should be no visual distraction and there should be strong visual contrast. E.g. Take a photo of a black ball on a plain white background.	Appropriate for children who can recognise objects in photos ( a PECS assessment might tell you this)
Symbol and word 	Symbols in black and white or colour depending on the preference of the child. Software/ Programmes such as Communicate In Print can be used. Alternatively a range of symbols can be found online.	Children who can match pictures and objects and understand that the symbol stands for the object or the activity.
Word 	Write the word on a page or use Microsoft word to create word visuals.	Children who can read and match words with symbols or objects; they understand that the word stands for the object or the activity.