

## Using a visual approach

We all learn in different ways. Many people are very reliant on visuals and use them every day.

- Do you use a calendar?
- Do you use a list for shopping?
- Do you use a map to find a location?
- Do you make “to do” lists?
- Do you use a recipe when cooking?

Temple Grandin, who has autism says she ‘thinks in pictures’

*‘words are like a second language to me.....when somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures’*

Grandin, 2006, p3

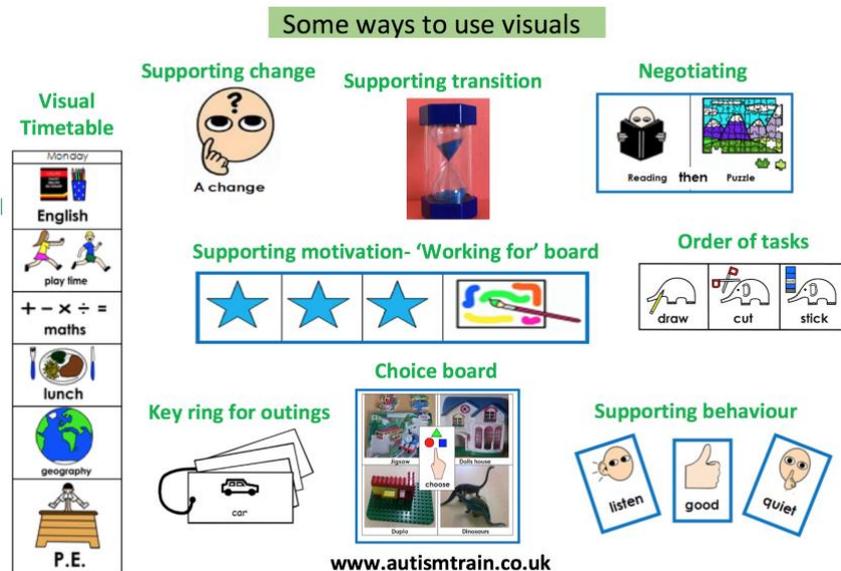
Although not all people with autism are such highly visual thinkers research suggests that pupils with autism are consistently better on visual-spatial tasks rather than verbal and sequencing ones.

Information that we hear is only fleeting whereas the visual image is available long after the words have gone. This means that if information or a task is presented visually the child with autism can understand more.

Young children with autism often find speech confusing and many parents have their child’s hearing tested but find that their hearing levels are fine. Many children with Autism don’t have a problem hearing but have difficulty processing language.

There are many types of visuals. It helps to show the child the real object, for example, when you want the child to understand they are going swimming show them the swimming costume or if you want them to clean their teeth show them their toothbrush.

Symbols can be anything which represents an idea or word and visuals can also include photographs, drawings, symbols and writing.



**Click here to download a larger version of the diagram**

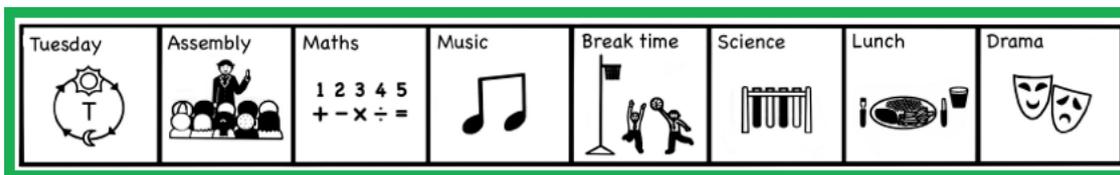
Visuals can be used both at home and at school.

### Visual timetables

- ❖ Using visuals such as a visual timetable will help the person follow the structure of the day.
- ❖ Being able to refer to it throughout the day means their anxiety is reduced.
- ❖ They can refer to the timetable rather than be constantly asking when an activity will take place.

Although visual timetables involve some effort to set up they are invaluable as they give the child structure and reduce anxiety

## An example of a class timetable



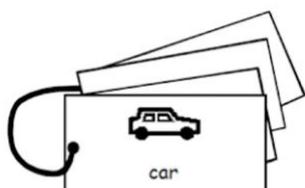
Reproduced from *Autism in the Secondary Classroom* Lots more information on using a visual approach in the classroom is available in the book.

## Some useful symbols for use at home



[Click here to download your copy of the home symbols](#)

Haitham Al Ghani, the illustrator, has kindly given permission for these symbols to be printed and used by families.



Cut out the individual visual symbols and blue tack or Velcro on to the base board to make an individual timetable. Instead of putting the symbols on a strip they can be joined with a treasury tab or put on a key fob. The advantages of this method are that the visual is easily accessible, fits in a pocket or bag and can be taken on outings.

Any change can result in the child with autism becoming anxious. Children with autism usually need support when preparing for a new environment experience, or a change of activity. Using a change sign or question mark helps the child to prepare and cope with changes to their routine.



Showing the child, a sand timer to give a warning of a change can be helpful. These can be purchased to indicate different spans of time. It is useful to have some with a short time such as 30 seconds and others with longer times.

First	Next
 dinner	 television

Using a 'first, next' board enables the child to know what adult directed activity they have to complete before they can choose their own activity.

'Working for ....' visuals are very helpful for motivating the child to complete activities. The child can choose what their reward will be for completing the tasks and fasten it to the board. It is often very motivating to choose stickers that reflect the child's special interest to put on the reward board.



Reproduced from *Autism in the Primary Classroom*. Lots more information on using a visual approach in the primary classroom is available in the book.

## Tips for implementing a visual approach

Allow the child plenty of time to process the information

Persevere- it may take the child time to associate the symbol with the object or activity

Remember to use speech as well as using the symbol. The symbol is a way to support the child's understanding of language not to replace it.

If you are worried about your child's language development or their understanding of speech ask for a referral to a speech therapist through your GP or school.

### References

Beaney, J. & Kershaw, P. (2014), *Autism in the Primary Classroom*, London: National Autistic Society.

Beaney, J. & Kershaw, P. (2014), *Autism in the Secondary Classroom*, London: National Autistic Society.

Grandin, T. (2006), *Thinking in Pictures*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.



Makaton is a language programme using signs and symbols to help people to communicate. It is designed to support spoken language and the signs and symbols are used with speech. The signs provide extra clues about what someone is saying.

If you have experienced the frustration of being unable to communicate meaningfully or effectively with your child, Makaton can help. Makaton takes away that frustration and enables individuals to connect with other people and the world around them.

For more information see <http://www.makaton.org/>

If you are interested in attending a course to learn Makaton signing contact

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[www.autismtrain.co.uk](http://www.autismtrain.co.uk)