Using Visual Schedules And Timetables

What?

What Are They?

A type of visual support to represent a sequence of events. Your child may have used 'first-then' boards and is now ready for more information.

Visual schedules could be a sequence of **steps in one task** (e.g., washing hands – put tap on, wet hands, get soap, rub hands etc) or multiple tasks in a set period (e.g., a morning, full day or a week). This will depend on your child's **level of understanding** and ability to **process information** as well as how much **support** they may need with each task; your therapist will be able to advise on where to start.

image taken from: pandaspeechtherapy.com
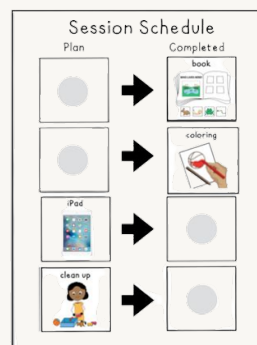
These can be made in multiple formats, some children may best understand **photographs**, some may use **symbols** and others the **written word.** The type of instruction we use will be dependent on the child's level of understanding, with photos being the easiest to understand and the written word being hardest. Again, your therapist will be able to advise where is appropriate to start

image taken from: halfpintpeeps.com

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When Do We Use Them?

When?
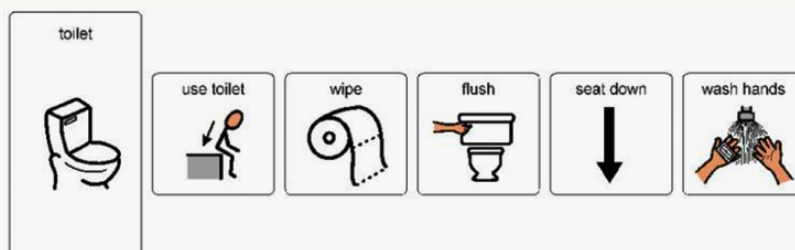
Any time! Anytime we are trying to communicate a plan in a clear and concrete way, a visual schedule can be used to **break down** the schedule into **manageable steps**.

Why Do We Use Them?

Why?

Many children experiencing **delays** in their understanding of language benefit from the use of visuals to provide additional information to help make sense of the world around them. Visual schedules can help make the plan more **accessible, easier to understand and remember.**

If children don't know what is happening or what is coming next, this can lead to increased **anxiety** and changes in **behaviour**. This may also result in a child becoming **distressed** or **struggling** to **enjoy and engage** in activities. Breaking activities or tasks up into manageable steps will build their understanding, increase autonomy, and provide more opportunities for success

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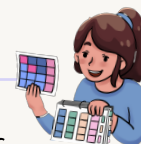
Many children may experience increased anxiety at times of transition or when something new or different is happening. Use of visual timetables can help **prepare the child for the change** and provide reassurance, so they understand something different is going to happen and how this relates to the rest of the plan. For example, 'first we have circle time, then snack, then school photos, then outside play'.

Consistent use of visuals may also lead to increased **independence** as the child can access the information on the sequence of events as they need to, without this being fully dependent on the adult.

How Do We Use Them?

How?

Once you know what type of visual your child needs (e.g., photos, symbols, written word), ensure you have these **prepared** and **available** throughout the day.

Decide how you will **break up the steps** needed to complete the plan and place the corresponding visual onto the **timetable** or **schedule**.

ISCAN
Integrated Service for Children with
Additional Needs

NHS
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NHS Foundation Trust

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How Do We Use Them?

How?

Always **talk through the timetable** or schedule at the start of the session or activity. Always use simple language alongside, emphasizing the **key words**, and **pointing** to the timetable with the instruction. Ensure this is visible throughout the plan or activity and refer back to this as needed. There is n**o expectation** for the child to point to this, it is a tool to support our language.

Top Tips

If a child is reluctant to follow an instruction, engage in an activity or doesn't appear to be responding to the visual – FIRST **consider**:

1

Are the steps **clear**? If a child doesn't know what is expected of them, it can be difficult to begin a task.

2

Is the task **achievable**? Does it need breaking down into smaller steps so the child can feel successful?

3

Is the task/activity **engaging**? Does it include their interest and things they like?

4

Is the child **feeling** any **heightened emotions** unrelated to the task, do they need some time before beginning?

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Top Tips

5

Does the child feel like they have **choice** in what is happening in the plan? (e.g., could they choose which shoes they will wear, where they will sit in the circle, can they choose what activity comes next?)

6

Are you being **consistent**? Using visuals is not always a quick fix and many children will require repeated, consistent exposure in order to understand the purpose of the schedule.

For specific tasks, is there a clear **'finished' or end point?** It can be daunting for many children if there is no clear end point, particularly if a task is new or challenging. It may be helpful to:

1

Include a **finished symbol** to provide a clear end point

2

Provide a **finished box** where the child may put each task or activity when finished

3

Take **symbols off** the timetable or schedule when completed

Even if you feel the child is beginning to respond to verbal instructions and is referring less to the schedule or timetable, please continue to provide access and model this. Our ability to understand and process language can vary depending on our emotional state, attention and listening and many other environmental factors (e.g., not sleeping well, noisy environments), so children may require it more on some days, not others. Always speak to your therapist if you feel like your child is ready to move on.