

# Waltham Forest Early Years Guidance

## Visual Aids

The purpose of this guidance is to support schools and early years settings, including childminders, in using visual aids in their provisions.

### What are visual aids and why are they important?

Visual cues are really important in supporting the development of all children and can take many forms. The more accurate visual information provided in a setting, the less anxiety children will encounter. The most important thing to remember is that a visual cue/visual aid is a constant, tangible thing, children can touch and hold them. Words are not; they disappear as quickly as they've been said.

The visual cue is a solid reminder of the instruction/information being shared. The information contained in a visual cue can be used to support not only children with SEND, but also children for whom English is an Additional Language, as well as all children, regardless of their level of development – this is inclusion at its finest!

### Symbols, photos or objects of reference?

It's important to consider which media you will use in your provision and be consistent with it. If a child has Speech and Language therapy involvement, they may have targets linked to visual supports for communication. Consistency is important. Everyone should be using the same method and the same thing; if 2 people have different symbols of a 'drink' it can be confusing for the child.



### Things to consider

Objects of reference - if a child's level of understanding does not extend to representative measures, objects of reference should be used BUT consider using symbols alongside the actual object to help the child begin to make the links.

**Photos** – what is in the photo? To us it may clearly be a picture of a cup on a table, but to a child it might be the tiny train on the cabinet in the background. Try to only have the object you want the child to focus on in the photo.

**Symbols** – are they too busy? As with photos, what else is going on? Also consider the subject – 'snack' might show biscuits. Are biscuits on offer?

### What to start with:

Individual symbols for snacks are a good place to start, as these are often the most motivating for a child. Have symbols for everything on offer and present to the child to help them in making their selection. Too many symbols may be over whelming, so consider presenting two symbols for the child to choose from. It may be best to present the item alongside the symbol first. Encourage the child to touch the corresponding symbol.



## Lanyards

Have key symbols on a lanyard so they are available at all time. 'Wait, toilet, sit, drink, stop,' may be the most useful to begin with. Don't have too many symbols on the lanyard, as if it takes too long to find the symbol you want, the moment will be lost. Consider more than one lanyard – one for outside and one for inside perhaps?

## Now / next boards

This is a good way to begin cooperative working with a child. 'First' we will do mark making (this could simply be putting a pen on a piece of paper) and 'then' we will do something that is motivating to them. This can be extended to now/next/then, as the child becomes more familiar with the system and can extend their attention skills.

## Visual timetables

These are excellent for ALL children and will help give them a visual representation of what to expect throughout their time at the setting. Ideally, they work vertically from top to bottom, but they can work horizontally left to right. Each symbol / photo should be removed once the activity/session has finished (removed completely or turned over). This helps to indicate it has happened and is now in the past. These are best used as a whole class during carpet sessions or during group times. Having a visual timetable in the provision supports all children and will then easily accommodate a child who requires an individual visual timetable.



## Labelling the environment

To be fully inclusive, symbols or photos can be used all around the setting. Often in the early years, drawers, and boxes and areas are labelled. Using photo labels helps children to know the contents of boxes or drawers'. This is also very helpful at tidy up times and to support independence in the setting.

It's especially important to have symbols available to support children in making requests. For example, placing a symbol card – toilet, on the toilet door, the classroom door and the playground door. Laminate another copy and velcro it to the symbol that has been stuck down. Encourage children to remove and exchange with an adult. This may require adult support and prompting but is valuable when toilet training.

## Final thoughts

Nobody likes to step out of their comfort zone into the unknown. We feel less anxious when we know what to expect. We like to be prepared with the right clothes and the right equipment; children aren't any different. Next time you ask a child to put on waterproofs before going outside, and their eyes show alarm, stop and think about how you have prepared them. Take time to look at every visual in the most literal way.

*"Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change." Wayne Dyer*

## Further information

[An introduction to visual cues - SENDsuccess](#)

[Widgit Online](#)