



What are visuals?

Visuals are pictures, photos, drawings, symbols or objects that are used to support both receptive communication (understanding) and expressive communication. As adults, we all use visuals in our daily lives. Think of how valuable reminders such as traffic lights, maps/GPS, calendars, lists and smartwatches are! Visuals are also helpful tools for children. They can be used with groups or individual children within early childhood education and care and outside of school hours care settings to support learning, comprehension, and expressive communication.

Visuals are static/concrete; they remain after words are spoken. This means children can look at visuals (and educators can refer to, point to, or show them) when the words are no longer there, so they can be used as a reminder of information about an activity, routine or expectation.

Why use visuals?

Using visuals assists children in knowing exactly what is expected of them or what is about to happen. Visuals also create opportunities for children to make choices, make requests, comment and be active communicators. When children have the support of visuals, they are encouraged to participate and engage in their day.

Educators use visuals to teach regular routines, appropriate (desired) behaviours, and new behaviours or skills. Visual sequences can support children to learn smaller steps of a task.

How to use visuals

A team approach is key when using visual supports. All educators working with the child or group of children should have a shared understanding of why the visual supports are being used (usually to support children's receptive and expressive language and understanding of what is expected of them or what will happen). They should also aim to use visual supports **consistently** with children and know when and how to show the visuals to children.

When educators show visuals to children, they use them with the spoken word and/or Key Word Sign. Educators should make visuals with words printed on them. Chosen words/labels enable all adults working with the children to use consistent language when referring to objects, rules, expectations, and routines. Children will benefit the most from visuals if all adults working with the child use them consistently, using the same words when presenting or referring to them.

Types of visuals

Many different types of visual supports can be used for different purposes in early childhood settings. The table on the following two pages provides examples and descriptions of some of the most commonly used visuals.

Types of visual supports

	<p>Routine Schedule</p> <p>Visuals can be used to display the order of routines and activities in your room. They can be used at group time to remind all children of the daily routine including any changes. Children can indicate the time of day with an arrow or a star.</p>
	<p>Task Sequence</p> <p>A visual task sequence can show each part of a task and the necessary steps to completing it. These tasks (e.g., hand washing, arrival procedure, going to the toilet) are generally done consistently and in the same order each time.</p>
	<p>Play Sequence</p> <p>A visual play sequence can be used to explicitly teach play skills. A series of photos can be made easily to demonstrate step by step play such as, block play, farm animals play, doll play, tea party play and playdough activities.</p>
<p>Do you want</p> <p>This or This?</p>	<p>Choices</p> <p>Offering choices gives children power and control (within limits). Choices can be made using actual objects or pictures. When a child can choose from 2 items/activities, you can increase the number of options. The child might choose with an eye gaze, a reach, touch the photo or even take it and give it to you – depending on their ability level.</p>
<p>1. First- pack up</p> <p>2. Then- Group time</p>	<p>First - then</p> <p>'First - then' can be used to encourage engaging with a non preferred activity / item followed by a favoured item/ activity.</p>
	<p>Timers</p> <p>Using a visual timer helps children anticipate a transition. We can 'forewarn' children a change is about to happen by giving them time to finish what they are doing.</p>

	<p>Social Skills Visuals and Social Stories</p> <p>Visuals or social stories can be used to teach social skills explicitly. They can act as a 'story' or 'script' to model positive interactions with others. Alongside pictures or photos, the text presented in a social story can help children learn about play, waiting for a turn, teaching games with rules and socialising.</p> <p>Note, a social story on it's own is unlikely to have impact on a child's social interactions, but it can be used to guide all of the adults around the child to use the same script when modelling and supporting the child in positive interactions with others.</p>
	<p>Behaviour reminders</p> <p>Visuals can show children expected or agreed upon behaviours for the room. Educators need to refer to the behaviour and positively reinforce children when they see that behaviour. The words written on behavioural visuals will help all adults to use the same positive words when talking about behaviours being encouraged.</p>
	<p>Environmental</p> <p>Visuals can be used around your room and outdoor area to remind children about physical boundaries. Educators can use-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stop signs Markers on mat Placemat on table Finish cloth

Top tips for effectively using visuals in your service:

- Pictures, photos or line drawings should be clear and easily understood by the child or children.
- Visuals should always be at the child's eye level.
- Visuals should include corresponding labels, words or a script.
- Visuals need to be accessible throughout your service (e.g., indoors, outdoors, in the bathroom, etc.) – consider using a key ring, blu-tac, or felt board.
- Consider storage – folders or clear shoe pockets can work well.
- Visuals should be used frequently, consistently by all educators and shared with the child's family for use at home if appropriate.