



## Visual Supports

There are a wide selection of visual supports available for you to print at home via the school website:

[www.riversideschool.org.uk](http://www.riversideschool.org.uk)

- Menu
- Information for families
- Resources for families
- Routines/Other Resources eg Boards and Charts

The screenshot shows the website interface for Riverside School. The header includes the school logo and the motto "Be All That You Can Be". A navigation menu on the right lists various resources. The main content area displays a list of visual support items, each with a download icon:

- SCHOOL MORNING SYMBOLS
- SCHOOL MORNING STORY BOARD
- MORNING ROUTINE SYMBOLS
- MY MORNING ROUTINE
- TOILETING
- GETTING DRESSED ROUTINE - GIRL
- GETTING DRESSED ROUTINE - BOY

The right-hand menu includes the following items:

- 5 A Day Home Access
- E-Safety
- Expressive Arts Resources
- LGFL Home Access
- Maths Activities
- Music Resources
- Other Resources eg Boards and Charts
- Recipes with symbols
- Routines

Please talk to your child's class teacher to see what type of visual support your child is currently using and what would be beneficial for you to try to introduce and support at home. We believe consistency is key.

If there is something that you would like to try at home that you cannot access via the school website resources, please do let your child's class teacher know and we will be happy to help.

## Visual Supports



**Research has shown that visual supports work well as a way to communicate.**

Visual supports can be used to communicate with a range of people. They are adaptable, portable and can be used in most situations. Visual supports can help to provide structure and routine, encourage independence, build confidence, improve understanding, avoid frustration and anxiety, and provide opportunities to interact with others. They can make communication consistent, rather than fleeting and inconsistent like spoken words can be.

### Types of visual support

A wide range of items can be used as visual supports. For example:

- Objects of reference, eg swimming trunks, fork, paintbrush. An **object of reference** is any **object** which is used systematically to represent an item, activity, place, or person. Understanding real **objects** is the first stage of symbolic development. Therefore, using **objects** is considered the most concrete way of representing a word.
- photographs
- miniatures of real objects
- coloured pictures
- line drawings – pen and paper or whiteboard and wipe able pen
- symbols
- written words.

These can be real objects, printed images, or on a smartphone, tablet or computer.

## Uses of visual supports

Visual supports can be used in a range of ways, eg:

- As a single message, eg to take a symbol or photograph of a drink from the classroom fridge door to indicate they want a drink.
- In combination to create a daily timetable, schedule, sequence or reward chart
- To make a choice, eg to use a choosing/choice board to indicate what they would like to do next.
- To help relieve any sense of anxiety by explaining what is happening now, next, then. This could be by using a Now and Next board or an objects of reference e.g. when it is time for art, a paintbrush may be used to stroke their arm to reinforce their understanding. This should be done consistently, so they become familiar and understand the representation.
- to illustrate a social story or comic strip conversation.

## Examples of visual supports

- Timetables to explain the ahead and demonstrate that activities will finish and move on to something next
- Daily Task Routines/Schedules e.g. bath time routine broken down into small steps
- Basic symbols or photographs to support someone to express an opinion or feeling e.g. by putting a thumbs down or a cross symbol next to an activity that they don't want to do or didn't enjoy
- Emotion scales to indicate how they are feeling
- Choice/Choosing boards to indicate what they want or need
- Now and Next systems
- Communication symbol boards to encourage conversation e.g. 'I like', 'What's that?'
- Calendars to help prepare for activities outside of the usual routine e.g. Christmas holidays
- Labels for objects and storage so they know where things are and can communicate to request them

- Photos of important people to explain where they are e.g. mum is at work, dad is at home.
- Photos or symbols of the places you visit; this may help when going in the car or on the bus to explain where you are going to.
- Objects of reference to be used consistently to represent an item, activity, place, or person.
- Talking about their body, health and pain
- Waiting strips/circles to support starting and finishing activities and to aid transition times
- Visual Scripts for social situations; 'when someone offers a plate of biscuits, do not take all of them'
- Social stories to tackle certain behaviours; 'we do not bite dad' etc

### **Top tips**

Make visual supports portable, durable, easy to find, personalise and consistent.

### **Portable**

Make the visual supports portable by:

- Putting symbols, pictures and schedules in a folder for the person to carry with them.
- Using a visual supports app on a tablet such as **Swift Key**.
- Storing photos and pictures on a smartphone
- Carrying a whiteboard and wipeable marker pen

### **Durable**

- Laminate printed visual supports.
- Back up any app, photos and pictures you use on a smartphone, tablet or computer.

### **Easy to find**

Ensure that visual supports are easy to find, for example by:

- Placing them in prominent places at eye level
- Putting them on an actual object
- Putting a single symbol in the person's pocket
- Having a communication book or folder with everything in
- Distributing them throughout particular environments, eg objects and areas in the classroom and at home could be labelled
- Putting a shortcut to them from a tablet home screen
- Attaching symbols to boards so that people know where to go to look at them - you could also use Velcro strips to attach symbols to a board, meaning schedules can be easily altered, eg activities removed once completed.

## **Personalised**

Visual supports are very personal and what works for one person may not work for another. Use the person's special interest, eg a visual timetable could be made in the shape of a rocket.

Remember that some people have difficulties generalising, eg they may not realise that a Hula Hoop packet symbolises all crisps.

It can sometimes be helpful to use more than one type of visual support, we use a total communication system at Riverside, not one system alone. Continue to support with speech, sign etc.

### **Tip for home:**

Display symbols or photographs of food and drink on your fridge or kitchen cupboards. This can be done with magnets, tape, or a cardboard/paper 'choice/choosing board' with photo/symbols attached. This way they can be taken to indicate a certain item is wanted. **This is a really motivating way to encourage meaningful communication.**

Your aim is to encourage communication; they might be able to get their own drink but put a barrier in the way if communication is what you are working on right now. There often needs to be a reason for them to want to communicate with you, especially when developing early communication skills.