

# Visual Timelines



**My child's speech and language therapist has suggested we use a visual timetable.**

## **What is it?**

A visual timetable or timeline uses pictures to break down steps of a task or a routine throughout the day. It is like us using a diary, following a recipe or making a list using pictures instead of words. If you look at the links at the end you can see lots of examples of visual timelines.

## **How will this help my child?**

Visual timelines can help children in lots of different ways:

- Children with difficulty understanding language may benefit from visual timelines because of the extra time they allow them to think. When we talk our words disappear quickly and children have to remember and work out what we have said. As pictures don't disappear your child can look at them and take in the information at their own pace.
- Visual timelines can also help support any child who is anxious, perhaps because they are going somewhere or doing something new, or don't understand routines. They are reassuring for children who need to know what is going to happen next in a task or routine so that they can anticipate this.
- Many children learn better when they have pictures to help them. Lots of children are visual learners which means that learn by seeing things rather than listening. Therefore, visual timelines build on your child's strengths to support other areas of learning that they are finding more difficult.
- Some professionals suggest that using symbols and visual timelines as part of a multisensory teaching approach that can include signing and speaking too, helps children behave well, develop literacy, be motivated, remind and reinforce concepts they know and lead to more independence.
- Visual timelines can also help if your child isn't reading yet or has any difficulties reading as it helps them to look at the pictures in the same ways that we read, moving from left to right.

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### **I CAN Help enquiry service**

**Phone** 020 7843 2544 for a free call-back from a speech and language therapist

**Email** [enquiries@ican.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ican.org.uk) Visit [www.ican.org.uk/help](http://www.ican.org.uk/help)

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## **My child has a specific language impairment and I've been told he has a poor memory. Would a visual timeline help?**

Some children with speech, language and communication Needs (SLCN) have poor memory for what they hear. Children with specific language impairment (SLI) find it much harder to remember what they have heard than other children. Visual support strategies such as visual timelines give your child more time to take in information and also gives them a reminder if they've forgotten or become distracted. This can help them to keep motivated and interested in what they're doing.

## **How can a visual timelines support my child's learning?**

Visual timelines can support your child's learning because they:

- are stable over time and don't disappear
- are relevant and meaningful to your child so that they are keen to know what will be happening
- attract and hold their attention
- support your child if they are a visual learner
- reduce anxiety as they know what's going to happen next
- make concepts more concrete, e.g. before, after, morning, afternoon, first, next
- can be used as prompts and reminders
- model what is important in a task
- communicate things that they might find difficult to understand otherwise
- help them cope with and prepare for changes
- increase independence
- are individual to them
- help your child's sequencing understanding and skills
- help them to scan left to right as they look at the timeline; these are the same skills needed for reading
- encourage children to 'read'
- help them learn the written words relevant to their day.

## **How can a visual timeline help my child's thinking skills?**

Visual timelines can be used to help bridge the gap between what is a real, visible object and what is more abstract and less obvious. For example:

- they can help to make other people's thoughts, feelings and intentions more obvious; e.g. getting dressed and going to school may not be important to your child but breaking down the steps to getting there will make it more meaningful
- Your child doesn't have to concentrate on *remembering* what they need to do so this allows them to *think* about the task.
- It helps your child to identify the final 'goal' of the task where it might be hard for them to do this otherwise. For example, if you have a visual timetable to help your child get dressed the final goal is that they have all their clothes on. The timetable structures how they can achieve this and the steps they need to take to get there.

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## **My child needs a visual timeline at nursery/school. How can I help them to get it right?**

To help settings we have produced a separate fact sheet for them, so the first thing you can do is encourage them to download this.

Depending on how old your child is they can help to make their own timetable, as this will help them to be actively involved in the process.

The setting may need your help to know if your child learns best from photographs, pictures or symbols and if they respond to these with or without words. You can also let them know how you use a visual timeline at home and also how you help your child move between activities (for example, do you sign 'finish' or have a picture).

If your child's setting has any questions they can contact us through the I CAN Help enquiry line, 020 7843 2544.

## **How can I make sure that the visual timeline will work effectively for us?**

*How* visual timelines are used is probably the most important issue. If your child has a speech and language therapist they will be able to guide you. Here are our top tips for making them work for your child:

- Visual timelines should be used as part of an interactive approach. Where possible try to involve your child in making the timeline so that they are active. For example, they can take photographs or help you to make up a picture.
- Use them consistently so that you refer to them during routines or activities. Timelines should be used consistently; they should be regularly referred to throughout the day.
- Make sure the language you use to support the timeline matches your child's level of understanding.
- Use your timeline alongside other approaches such as signing. This makes sure that you have a multi sensory approach (sometimes called Total Communication) to helping your child's communication needs.
- Keep them so that your child can see them - they need to be at their height!
- Laminate your pictures so that they last longer!

## **How do I make a visual timeline with my child?**

First have a chat with your speech and language therapist or your child's teacher to find out how they learn using pictures. This will help you to know whether to use photographs, colour pictures or line drawings. Then it's a case of taking the pictures or downloading them.

You can find out more by looking at the links below.

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For examples of how visual timetables and other visual support can be used go to:

[www.widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com) information on how to make a visual timetable and examples  
<http://usefulwiki.com/displays/2006-11-13/visual-timetables/> an example of a 'wall' of schedules.

<http://www.pecs.org.uk/shop/asp/default.asp> resources for visual support including visual time tables.

<http://teacch.com/educational-approaches/structured-teaching-teacch-staff>

<http://www.do2learn.com/> to download pictures and make a visual timeline

[www.symbolworld.org.uk](http://www.symbolworld.org.uk) to download pictures

<http://www.pdictionary.com/> for pictures

If your child has autism or Asperger's syndrome you can find out more on how visual support can help them at [www.nas.org.uk/visualsupport](http://www.nas.org.uk/visualsupport)



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