Symbols

Guidance on the benefits of visual resources and how to use them

About

- Symbols are often used with children with additional needs where language may be a barrier to communication or where a child may respond better to visual prompts as opposed to verbal instructions.

- We all use symbols in our everyday life. We must learn what traffic signs mean if we want to learn to drive a car. We all recognise toilet signs, and famous food outlet symbols even when abroad. We have learnt these symbols, so they are meaningful to us.

Symbols may be used in lots of different ways, for example:

- On a visual schedule to help children understand their routines, engage with them, and help to reduce anxiety, see the 'Visual Resources' information sheet.
- As a means of communication through a communication book, board, or device.
- As visual cues around the school or home, or wider environment for example to label rooms such as the toilet or to teach routines such as hand washing.

What does a symbol look like?

When we use symbols with a child, they need to be at the right level for their understanding and we need to use them consistently, so they learn to understand them. We may use:

- **Object of reference** - these may be the actual object you are referring to, or a smaller version or representation e.g. at bath time, you may use a sponge to represent this. This may be appropriate where a child has a learning difficulties or visual impairment so they can learn the item by touch.
- **Photo** - These may be used where a child is able recognise 2D images, though needs an exact reference e.g. their own toothbrush, or possibly a generic photo of a toothbrush. Ensure the object you are communicating is the focus of the photo by using a plain background to reduce distraction or confusion.
- **Generic Symbols -** These are more abstract images that represent the item e.g. a drawn outline of a bed, and can be generated through a search engine or a commercial package such as Boardmaker. Again the background would be a plain solid colour to reduce visual distraction.

Top Tip Toolkit

- Laminate your symbols so they can be re-used and will last longer.

- Use the same symbol across all environments to support learning and engagement.

- Make sure the words are clearly visible and easy to read, e.g. consider size and colour. Use a font such as Comic Sans which is easy to read.
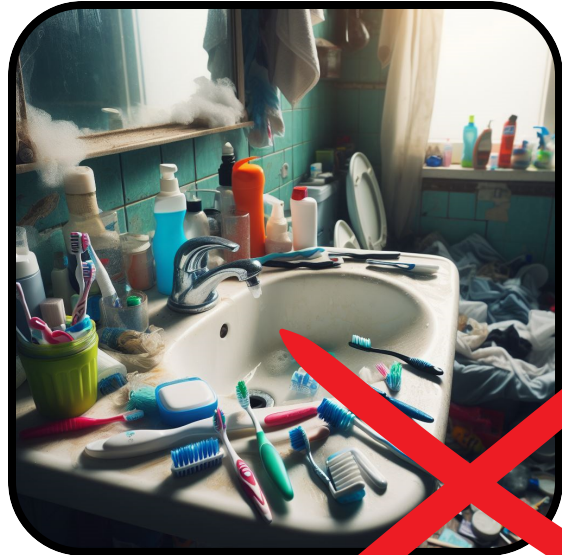
Examples

Photo

✓

✗

Symbol

Teeth

Teeth

Teeth

Object of reference

 = **Bathtime**