The Value of Visual Supports

The value of providing information visually to people with Autism has long been known and is well documented—for times of change visual supports make it easier for them to predict "what is going to happen".

One of the real strengths of people with Autism is their visual skills. They are usually more able to understand what they SEE than what they HEAR.

The term 'visual supports'—referring to anything that allows information to be presented in visual form—enables better understanding and serves as a reminder of may have been said. A visual support can also act as a useful prompt for the child with Autism to convey their message to us—they may have their own, personalised, visuals.

Everybody uses visual supports—shopping lists, traffic signs, reminder notes, appointment cards etc.

Why are visual supports so helpful for children with Autism?

- They allow the child to see what you mean, rather than relying on their ability to understand what was said.

- Some visual supports, e.g., a calendar or timetable, can help them understand the sequence of events over the day or week and help them to predict what will happen next. This could certainly help to reduce anxiety.

- Visual supports give the child more time to process incoming messages. The visual remains in view whereas words 'disappear' as soon as they're spoken.

- Visual supports can help them to be more independent, as they are less likely to rely on verbal prompts. The information is literally to hand.

- Visual supports can help to motivate the child as they build on their (visual) strengths—information is instantly grasped.

- Visual supports can provide the child with Autism a means of getting their own messages across, instantly.

One of the most common causes of challenging behaviour is the frustration experienced by people with Autism when they are not able to communicate what they need or want.

By providing them with appropriate visual supports, we can make it possible for them to get their messages across more effectively.