

Multi-Sensory Support

We all use multi-sensory prompts, especially visual ones, every day: for example logos, road signs maps and lists but also title music or even the smell of bread in the bakery department of a store. They help us to understand information in a quick and easy way.

Children usually find it easier to understand things they can see and experience before words, for example, they will usually recognise a photo of a dog before they understand the word “dog”.

In addition to helping a child understand what you are trying to communicate to them, visual and multi-sensory supports can help develop understanding of actual words.

There are several different types of visual support we can use, to help children understand what we are saying such as:

- ❖ **Real objects (See Objects of Reference handout)**
- ❖ **Photos**
- ❖ **Dolls’ house (small world) versions of real objects**
- ❖ **Coloured or black and white pictures**
- ❖ **Line drawings and symbols such as Boardmaker or Makaton symbols**
- ❖ **Gestures, or sign language such as Makaton**
- ❖ **Written words**

Introduce visual supports gradually, one at a time. Use them repeatedly so the child gets plenty of practice.

Examples of other types of multi-sensory support are:

- ❖ **Textures (for example for children with a visual impairment)**
- ❖ **Sounds and music**
- ❖ **Sensory experiences (for example a plant-watering spray to symbolise a shower)**

Some of these multi-sensory supports are easier to understand than others. Discuss with your speech and language therapist which will be best for any particular child.

Some examples of how multi-sensory supports can be used are:

Timetables- a sequence of pictures to help a child understand what he is doing and what will happen next (see Social Communication –Visual timetables)

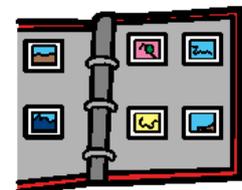


Photo albums of familiar people and objects

Building understanding of pictures and symbols by attaching visual supports to the things they represent

Adding ‘sound effects’ and gestures to stories and rhymes

