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