

Using pictures and symbols in early years settings

For many children, a nursery environment can present challenges. An environment with lots of noise can make attention, listening and understanding even harder. Children may find it difficult to make choices or access a range of opportunities. The following may be useful ways to adapt the environment and may benefit lots of children.

Having defined spaces for activities is useful. These can be labelled – the puzzle table, the home corner, and computer – and supported with symbols or pictures to reinforce the area and activity. Label equipment and defined spaces for activities. Using symbols and pictures can provide opportunities for children to make meaningful choices



Giving the setting sessions defined times with labels, pictures or symbols is also useful. Snack time, tidy up time or circle time will again provide more security.

Children often need help in learning the setting routines but knowing these routines will then provide a good deal more security. It is helpful to lead children through routines like coats on and off, or what happens at snack time, taking lots of time and demonstrating with simple language to describe what is happening.



Visual timetables A visual timetable is a series of pictures, symbols or objects representing the activities happening during a session.

Using a visual timetable:

- Supports comprehension – children can relate the words they are hearing to the picture they see.
- Develops sequencing skills and routine – children can refer to what will be happening next or where they are up to in their day.
- Develops the ideas of time and completion – we can talk about concepts of time such as now, later, next and finished.
- Helps children review what they have done.

