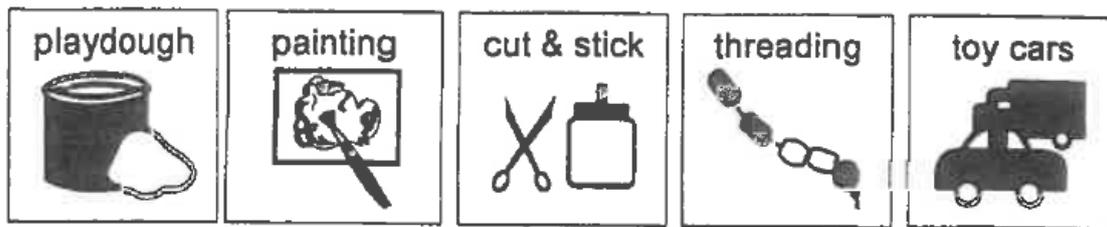


## Using pictures and symbols in early years settings

For many children a nursery environment can present a number of challenges from the outset. 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.

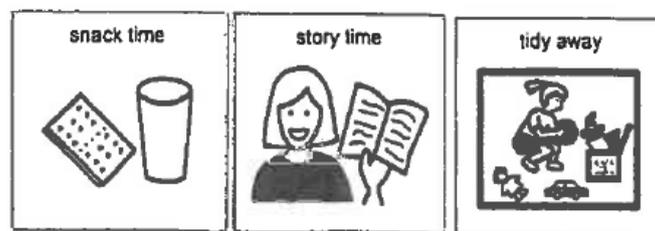
Having defined spaces for activities is really useful. These can be labelled – the puzzle table, the home corner, and computer – and also supported with symbols or pictures to reinforce the area and activity.



*Label equipment and defined spaces for activities*

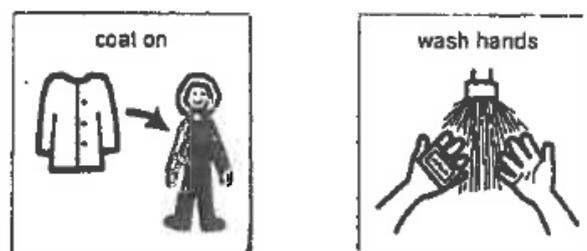
In addition, using specific symbols and pictures can help in a child's confidence with their space. We can use them to label equipment, areas and activities, enabling children to find what they need and supporting the associated language.

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



*Defined session times*

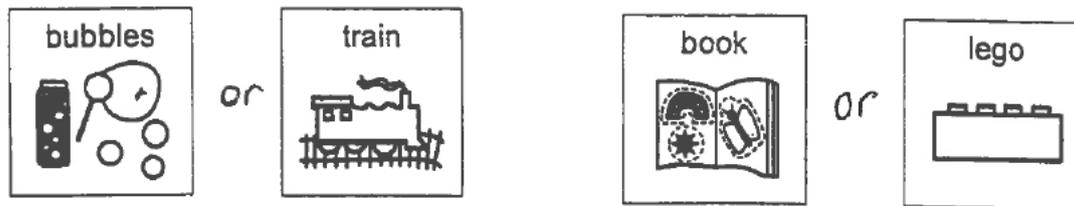
Children often need help in learning the nursery routines, but knowing these routines will then provide a good deal more security. It is helpful to lead children through routines like coats on and off, or what happens at snack time, taking lots of time and demonstrating with simple language to describe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



*Supporting children with routines*

Using photographs of the child, their family and significant people can help to support conversations. If children find it hard to say people's names, they can show the photographs and provide context for the conversation.

Symbols and pictures can provide opportunities for children to make meaningful choices. Using pictures or symbols to offer a forced alternative such as "video or book", "milk or juice" and "puzzles or construction". This provides the child with modelled language in respect of the activity or object that is being requested. In addition they can be used to display instructions of what to do during an activity.



*Using pictures to help make choices*

Children often have problems in knowing where they are in the day or the sessions and what is coming next. They may often miss out on verbal instructions, on what is happening and how things fit together, so it is useful to give this information visually and to keep it displayed so they can refer to it during the day for added security.

### **Visual timetables**

A visual timetable is a series of pictures, symbols or icons representing the activities happening with a nursery 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.

There are different ways that a visual timetable can be used.

1. We can fold a large strip of paper into the right number of sections. In each section we can draw a simple line drawing of the activities of the session, talking through simply what will be happening at the same time. In this way the timetable can be somewhat personalised or tailored to the group or particular children. At the end of each activity, or the end of the session, we can cross off the activities, showing and talking about them being finished.



2. We can have printed symbols made into cards and talk through the activities for the day. These can be stuck on with Velcro or pegged on a string and removed after the activity is complete. Children can be asked to take the label off and perhaps post the card in a box to show the activity is finished. This provides an opportunity to review what the children have done and look towards what will happen next. The same symbols can be used elsewhere in the nursery to label equipment or activities, enabling the child to match if necessary. The symbols can be presented left to right to support pre-literacy skills or top to bottom.



These timelines are useful to the whole nursery. Some children may benefit from having individual timelines or schedules.