

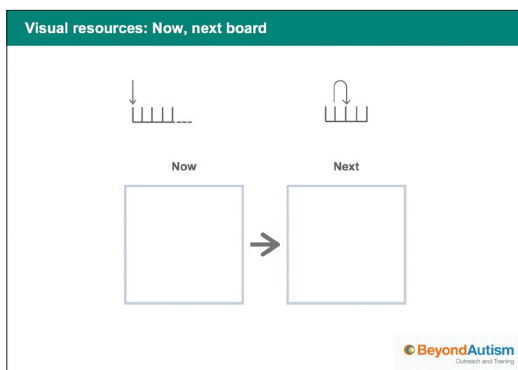
Helpful tools and strategies

Here are some strategies that can be helpful for supporting autistic people. As each autistic person has their own individual needs, it is often described as a 'spectrum'. This may mean that you will need to personalise strategies to your child's individual needs. You are the best placed person to do this, as you know your child best!

Increasing routine and predictability

Using a visual schedule can help a child to follow a routine. Predictability and consistency can be beneficial here.

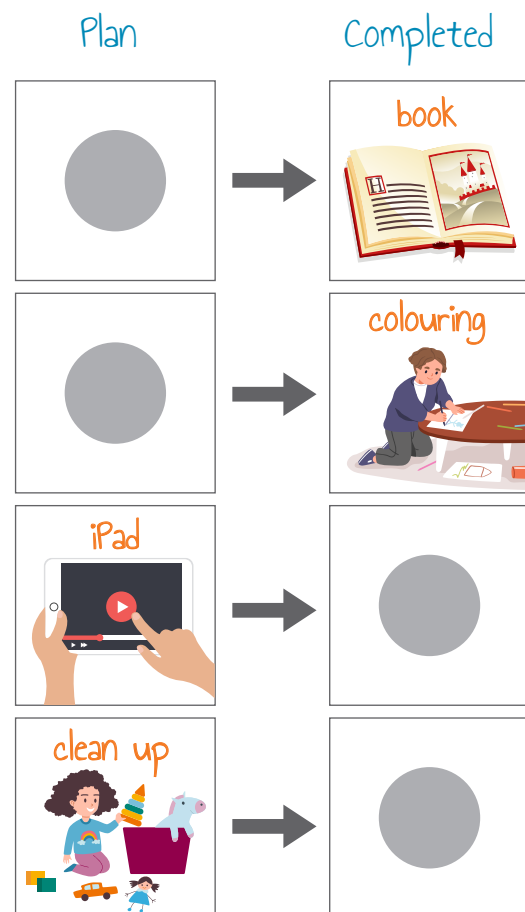
Now/next or first/then board: Now/next or first/then boards can be an effective way to illustrate a small change or transition. It can be effective in supporting people who struggle to understand what is happening or used to motivate children to complete activities. On the lefthand side is the current activity and on the righthand side is the future activity.



Top tip:

When you first introduce a now/next or first/then board, make sure that both activities presented are preferred activities. Once the individual understands the concept of the board, a motivating activity should always follow a lesser preferred activity.

Activity schedule: Activity schedules provide individuals with more 'permanent' reminders of the upcoming activities for a set time period. Because the information is presented visually, this allows the individual to process the information better than if the information were given vocally due to visual information being more 'permanent'. Activity schedules also function as reminders for the upcoming activities and increase predictability around the order in which activities will occur. When setting up an activity schedule, include the main activities for the day.



Top tip:

Include your child in setting up the schedule for the day. Have them remove or cross off the activity as it is completed.

Visual stories: These outline what to expect in a specific situation e.g., going to the supermarket. Include: where, what, who with, when, when the activity will finish, what your child can do or you will do if they need support.

Consider using photos of your child doing activities and your child's own items if pictures don't appear to be effective. Give your child the choice of photograph versus symbols and see which they respond best to.

Top tip:

Go through the visual story with your child a number of times when they are feeling relaxed before they encounter the situation that the story is about.

For more information on visual stories and resources, visit our website or refer to the **Visual supports** factsheet.

Communication

Alternative communication methods can be explored with your child to find the method that is the best fit for them. This may be Makaton (sign) or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). See the **Alternative communication tools** factsheet for more information.

- Allow processing time. This will be different for everyone. Give a minimum of 5-10 seconds before repeating yourself
- Use your child's name first when speaking
- Include the key information only e.g., 'shoes on' versus 'can you find your shoes and put them on'
- Be aware of your own tone of voice and body posture
- Consider preferred communication methods – photos, written, sign
- When your child is doing something you do not want them to do, focus on what they can do instead.

Timers

Timers provide a visual representation of time and can help with managing transitions.

- Some examples: sand timer, photo timer app, traffic light timer
- Countdown strips (remove the number from the strip as a period of time passes)
- or Lego blocks (remove a block from a tower as a set period of time passes)

Top tip:

Introduce the timer with it counting down to something fun starting before you introduce the timer counting down to starting lesser preferred activities.



Consistency

Although this can be hard at times, try to be consistent with routines and any strategies you are putting in place. Give all strategies up to 4 weeks as it can take this long for them to become effective.

Speak to your child's nursery or school setting and the rest of your family to create a plan of the strategies that work for your child, to enable consistency across people and settings.

Sensory regulation

Each autistic person will have their own sensory needs. See the factsheet about **Understanding your child's sensory needs** for more information.

Choice

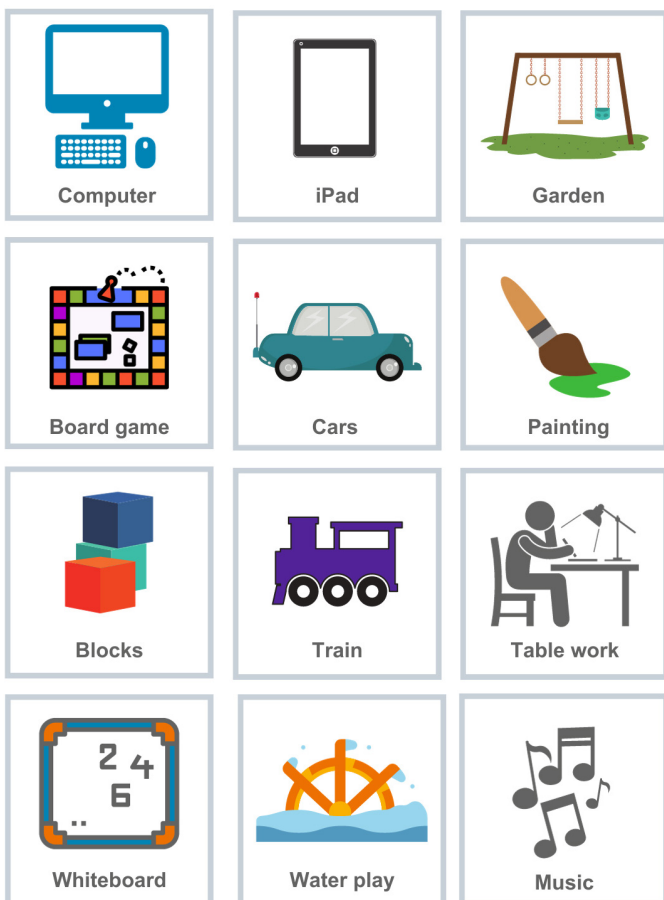
If your child is finding it hard to engage in an activity or follow an instruction, provide choices, wherever possible. You can use photo visual choice boards, do this verbally, or write down choices.

Top tip:

If giving choices verbally, aim to give no more than two to three choices. Giving too many verbal choices at one time can become too much for your child to process.

If you are giving choices visually you can offer more choices, as the visual aid allows your child to process the information more easily. However, when introducing the choice board, start with two to three visuals.

Below is an example of a choice board.



Self-care for yourself

This is important generally for your own wellbeing and enabling you to be in the best space to support your child. See the factsheet on **Parent Mental Health and Wellbeing** for some ways to promote this for yourself.

Try to educate the people in your child's life on autism, and/or direct them to these factsheets, to increase understanding about your child's needs. For further support and guidance on the professionals that can support further with strategies for your child, take a look at the **Navigating getting support** factsheet.

Special interests

Incorporate your child's interests into daily activities and allow regular access to them.

Top tip:

Use your child's interests to support when doing an unpreferred activity either by using a now/next board (now unpreferred activity, next interest-based activity) or by incorporating interests into the unpreferred activity to make it more fun.

