

## Asperger Syndrome - Visual Aids and Communication

By Nelle Frances Children with Asperger's Syndrome respond well to visual cues, so a visual timetable in the classroom and home is a beneficial communication tool that can be easily modified to meet the needs of children with Asperger's Syndrome of all age groups. The kind that has removable, Velcro pieces is most versatile. A 'bank' of appropriate, laminated pieces can be kept and added to as needs change and grow, with some 'blanks' for unexpected tasks. Pictures work well from age 2-9, then a mixture of words and pictures, progressing to words for High School/College. Actual photographs of people and places (e.g. library) are great. A Timetable displayed for the whole class with a replica on the Asperger child's desk or work area has the most successful outcome. These timetables can be enhanced with color-coding as well e.g. red for maths, green for English or alternately color code for time of day, red for morning program, blue for middle of the day, green for afternoon. The completion of the timetable should be a negotiation between the child with Asperger's Syndrome and parent/teacher/assistant, as this promotes a sense of ownership of the chosen tasks, and allows for a degree of 'control' by the Asperger child. The timetable should have 2 clearly defined areas - 'To Do' and 'Done', with the Asperger child moving the pieces from one area to the other as tasks are completed. This gives the child a sense of achievement even on the worst days. 'Even though you had a meltdown, you managed to complete 3 tasks - good job!' Timetables should be modified to suit your Asperger child's individual needs i.e. if your child operates best with a degree of rigidity, the timetable should be followed in order. Equally, if your Asperger child likes to be in control of choices, then they may choose the order of completing tasks within the morning, middle and afternoon programs. I must emphasize the importance of having some 'down' times each day to allow for unexpected events. (Remember, children with Asperger's Syndrome don't cope with change or surprises). Don't fill the timetable so completely there's no room for the unexpected twists and turns of a normal day. This will just create added stress and pressure to achieve for your child with Asperger's Syndrome. If a child completes the activities ahead of time, they can be 'rewarded' with a favourite activity. In our home we also have a visual aid showing 'What's On' and 'Equipment Needed', to improve organization skills. Again, we have removable pieces. So if there's swimming lessons at school we have a picture of a swimmer in 'What's On' and in 'Equipment Needed' we have a picture of a towel, swimmers, hat, goggles and sunscreen. This works for Art activities, Excursions, Sporting Events, Cooking, Special Projects etc and is only limited by the laminated pieces in your 'bank'. This chart is set each night before bed. In the morning our Asperger son simply checks his chart for the extra equipment needed for the day and packs his school bag. The benefits reaped from using Visual Aids for your child with Asperger's Syndrome far outweigh the time required to make the resources - I recommend you start collecting pictures for your child's 'picture bank' today! Of equal importance to assisting your Asperger child's communication ability is continuous communication between school and home. This is vital to the success of your Asperger's Syndrome child as a student. This communication may be achieved with a phonecall between parent and teacher each morning, however, if this isn't possible a Communication Book is just as effective. A Communication Book allows parents to jot down any issues/changes that may be affecting their child with Asperger's Syndrome. What's more, it allows Teachers to briefly comment on the Asperger child's day, mentioning what they are working on in class and the social skill that's being concentrated on for the week. Using a Communication Book this way ensures emerging skills are consolidated at home and school. Remember, seemingly inconsequential issues could be a major factor to the success of your Asperger child's day at school or home. As most children with Asperger's Syndrome don't convey much about their school day to parents, a Communication Book gives clues to help you initiate a more detailed conversation, and encourage verbalisation of thoughts and feelings. Best of all though, a Communication Book will help parents/teachers focus on the Asperger child's positives, and praise them accordingly! [www.nellefrances.com](http://www.nellefrances.com)

### About the Author

Nelle Frances is the mother of a 15 year old with Asperger's Syndrome, a Special Needs Educator and Author of the Ben and His Helmet series of books for Asperger children. She is also an active member of 5 Asperger's Syndrome Support and Advocacy Groups. For more information and Support Strategies visit [www.nellefrances.com](http://www.nellefrances.com).

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