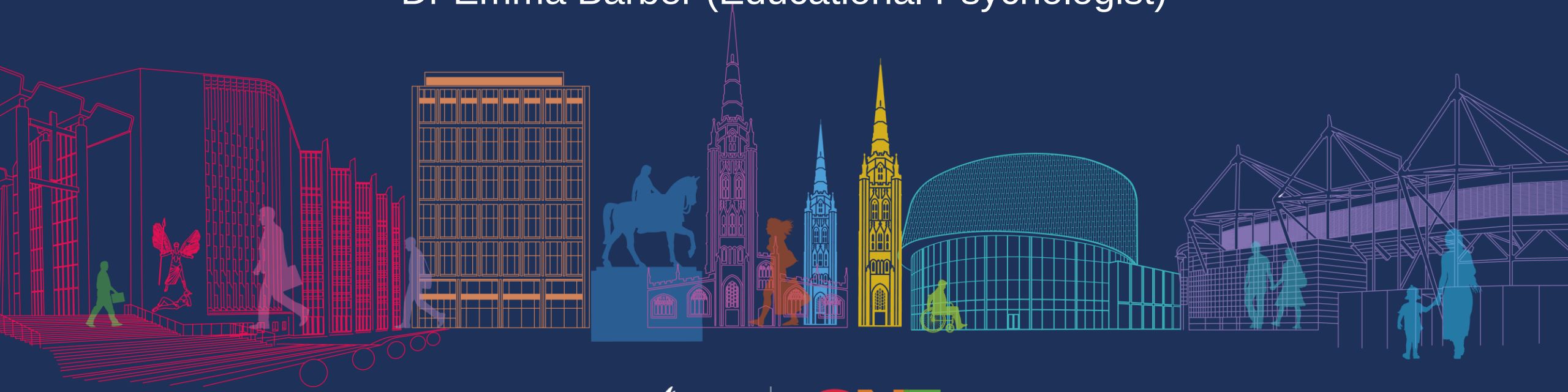
Supporting autistic learners who mask

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Coventry City Council

ONE COVENTRY

Outcomes

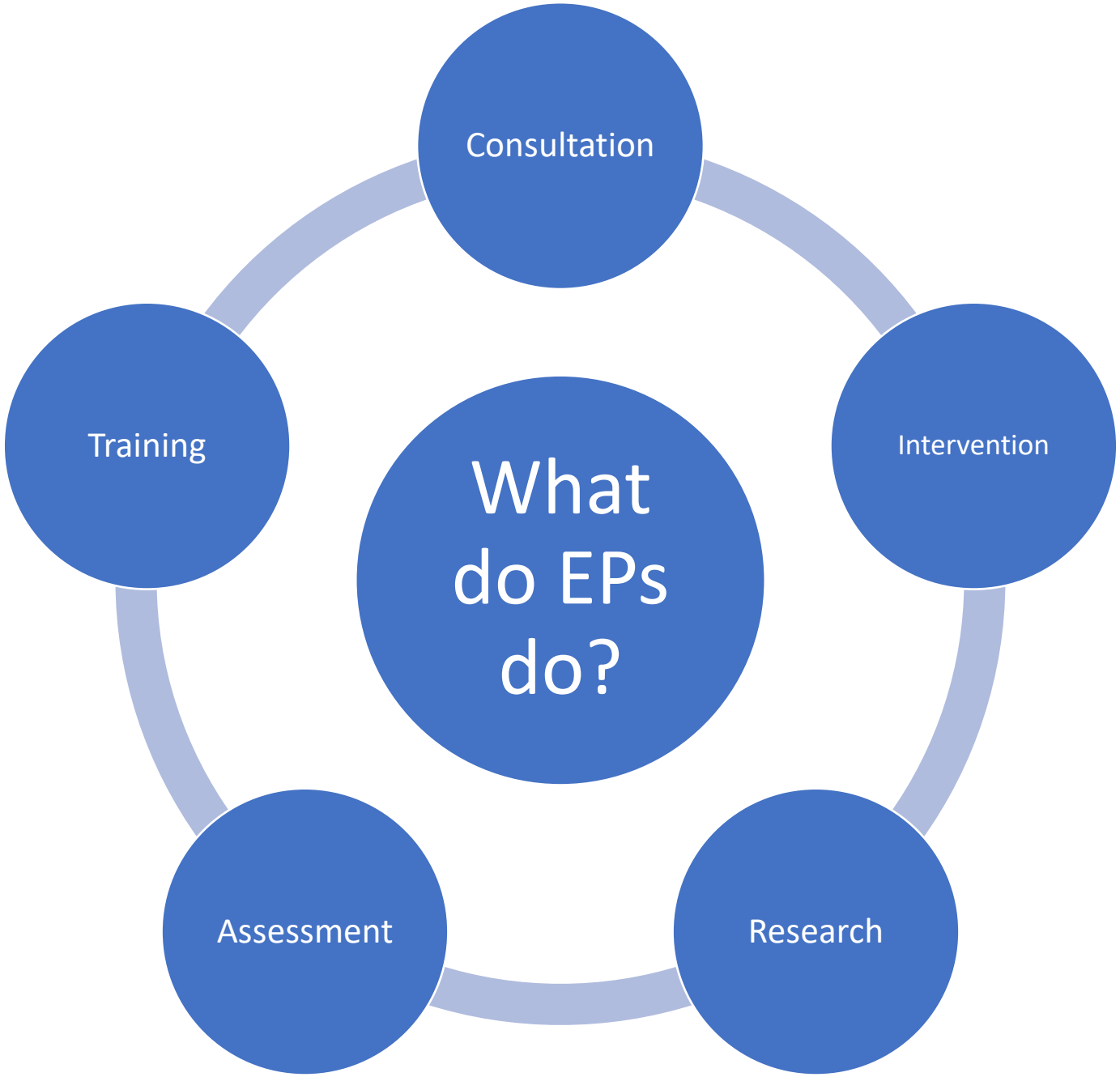
- To develop a shared understanding of what masking is
- To understand the impact that masking can have on an autistic child
- To develop strategies to support a child who is masking at home.

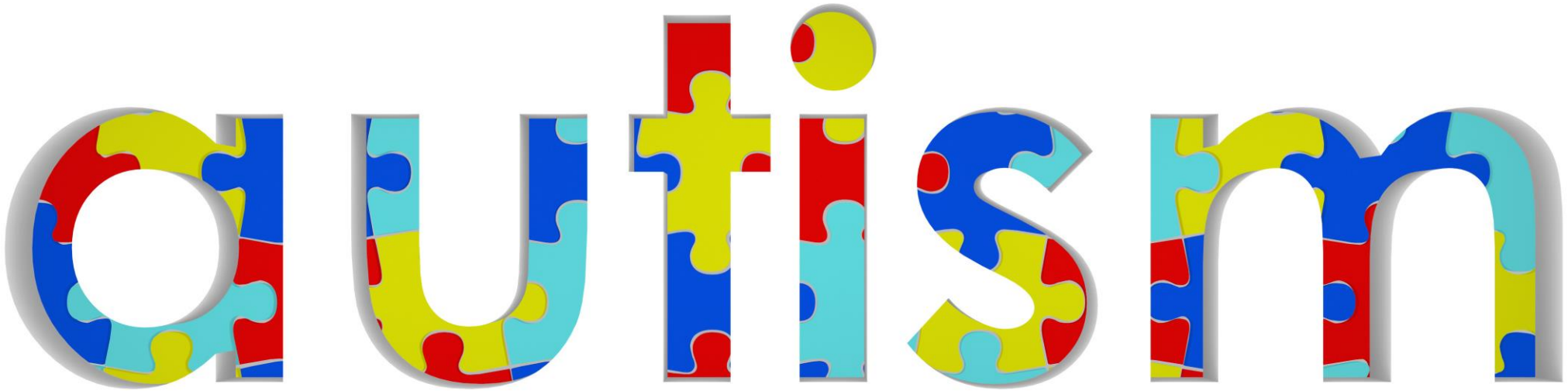
Specialist Services



Who we work with…

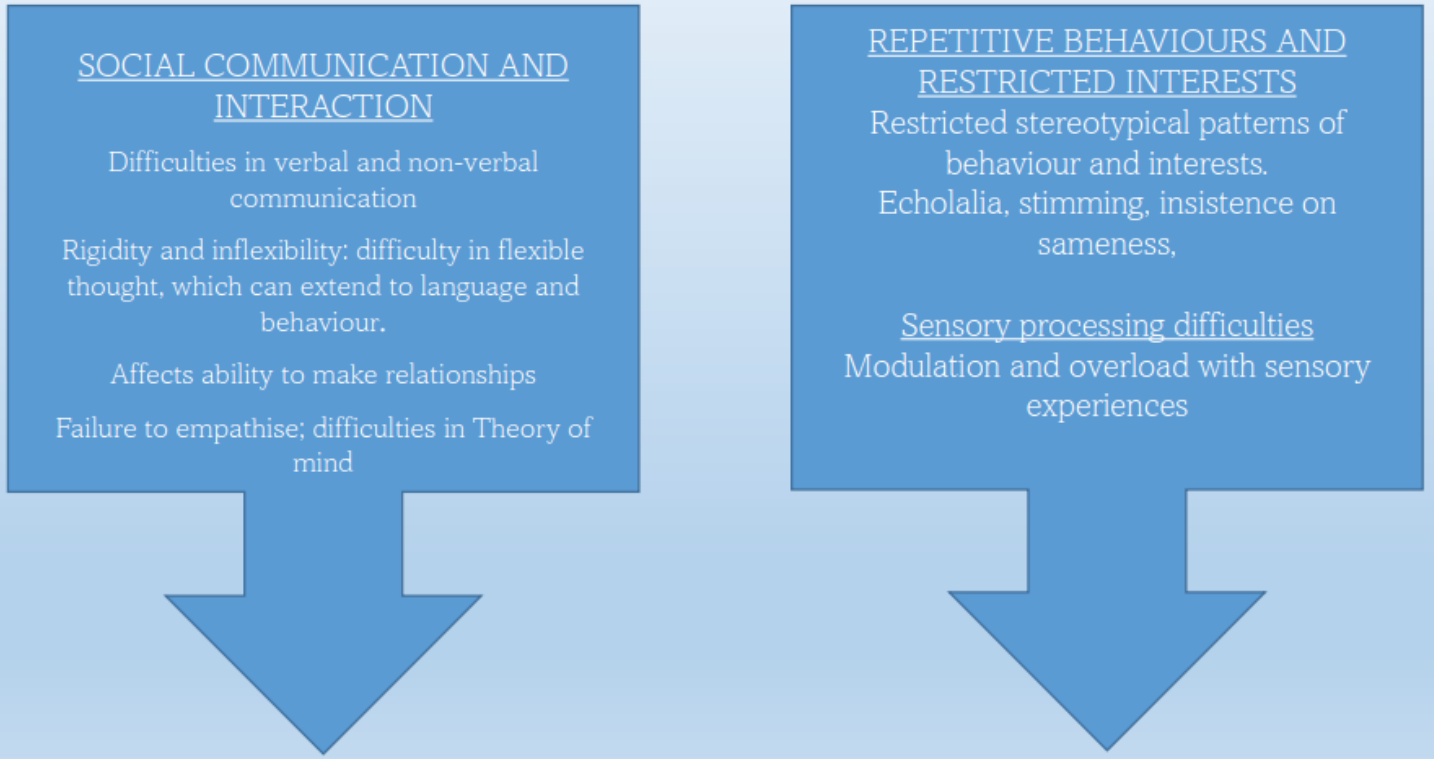
- Children and young people from 0 – 25
- In nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools and colleges (Mainstream and Specialist settings)
- Support a range of difficulties: Social, Emotional and Mental Health, Cognition and Learning, Physical and Sensory, Communication and Interaction
- We work with the young person and the key adults in their lives (usually parents/carers and teachers.)


Consultation
Intervention
Research
Assessment
Training
What do EPs do?


autism

The Dyad of Impairment

(Wing and Gould 1979)





Autism is like a rainbow,
each colour
represents different
personalities and quirks.

What is masking?

“The ability to hide autism traits with neurotypical behaviours. I learnt from a young age that my way was wrong and their way was right. What I needed to do was get as close as I could to the way they were behaving and that would lead to success.”



Everyone masks sometimes, don’t they?




Poor concept of time
Changes in routine
Does not know / understand rules
Unsure what is going to happen
STRESS
Anxious about failure
Difficulties with communication
Sensory difficulties
Literal interpretation of situation
MELTDOWN!

Effects of masking

- Exhausting
- Affects both physical and mental health
- Can lead to autistic burn out
- “If something doesn’t feel right for me, I need to fix it and I need to fix me.”

How can we help?

- Relationships are key
- Consider use of language
- Autism friendly environment
- Sensory/movement breaks

What is Emotion Coaching?

Using moments of heightened emotion, and resultant behaviour, to guide and teach children about their emotions and about more effective responses.

Reacting with empathy and care to children's emotional states to support their development of emotional regulation skills.

Based on the principle that emotions are natural and normal; it's what we do with them that counts.

Drawing from neuroscientific research to create an evolutionarily and developmentally appropriate response to emotional situations.

Why use Emotion Coaching?

Emotion coaching is an evidence-based strategy based upon the work of John Gottman

Emotion coached children are better able to:

- control their impulses
- delay gratification
- self soothe when upset
- pay attention



As a result emotion coached children

- Achieve more academically in school
- Are more popular
- Have fewer behavioural problems
- Have fewer infectious illnesses
- Are more emotionally stable
- Are more resilient

(Gottman, et al 1996)

The 4 steps of emotion coaching

Step 1	**Recognize** the child's feelings and **empathize** with them
Step 2	**Validate** the feelings and **label** them
Step 3	Set **limits** on behaviour **(if needed)**
Step 4	**Problem-solve** with the child

Step 1: Recognise and Empathise

- Recognise all emotions as being ***natural and normal*** and not always a matter of choice
- Recognise behaviour as communication
- Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt
- Take on the child's perspective (Mentalising/ Mind-mindedness)
- Affirm and empathise, allowing to calm down

Step 2: validate and label

- Validate the emotion and acknowledge its existence
- Use words to reflect back child's emotion
- Help child/ young person to label emotion
- Provide a narrative/translation for the emotional experience (creating cognitive links)

Step 3: Setting limits (if needed)

- Separate the emotion from the behaviour
- The emotion is fine, normal and natural...the behaviour is unacceptable
- State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour
- Make it clear certain behaviours cannot be accepted
- But retain the child's self-dignity *(Crucial for responsive behaviour and* well-being)

Step 4: Problem-solving with the child

- When the child is **calm** and in a relaxed, rational state:
  - **Explore** the feelings that give rise to the behavior/problem/incident
  - **Scaffold** alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes
  - **Empower** the child to believe s/he can overcome difficulties and manage feelings/behaviour

What if a child is too dysregulated to engage with the steps?



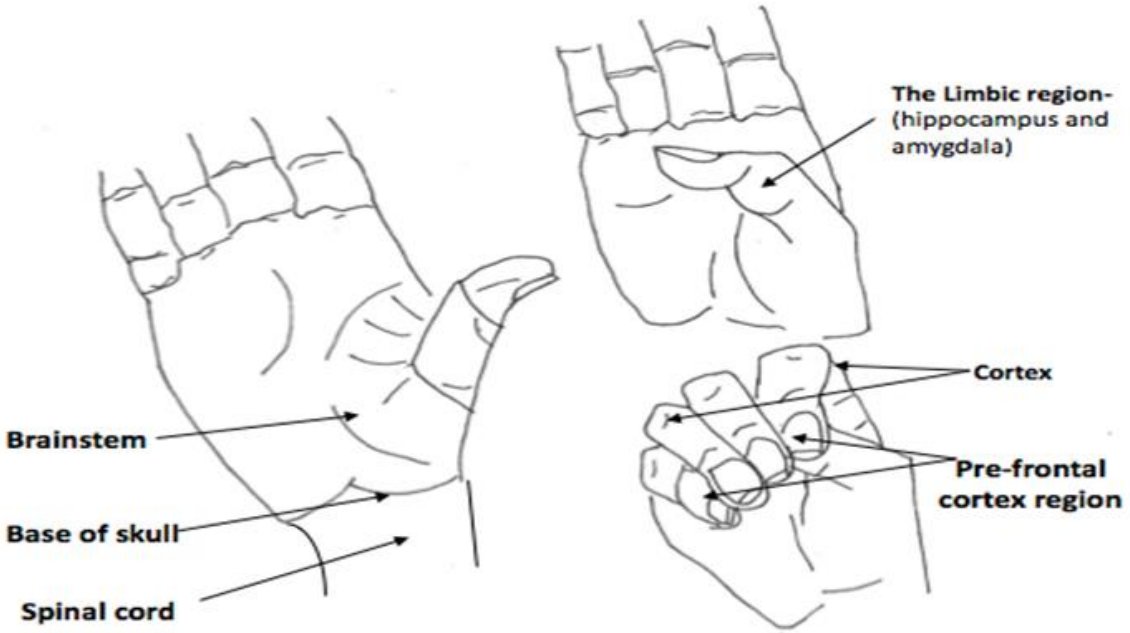






4-7-8 Breathing Exercise by GoZen

Our hand held



Siegel, 2012

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw

- Upstairs brain – for thriving
- Downstairs brain – for surviving

What can school do to help?

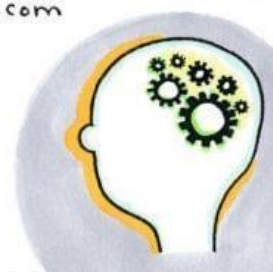
- Children with autism are often highly visual so schools play to this strength by using visuals wherever possible. This could mean a visual timetable that includes symbols/pictures not just words.
- Schools should consider the classroom environment and ensure it is clutter and distraction free. This could mean using low arousal colours on displays and white boards, avoiding patterns and stripes and keeping desk areas tidy. It also means considering sights, smells, sounds and proximity to others.
- Turning off electric lights or projector fans when not in use will help to avoid sensory overload.
- A system where a child is able to go to a safe space to self-regulate when they feel overwhelmed.
- Opportunities for movement and sensory breaks.
- Providing children with equipment and resources that support their needs.

9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS

www.northstarpaths.com @kwiens62



• VISUALS ARE PERMANENT (SPOKEN WORDS DISAPPEAR)



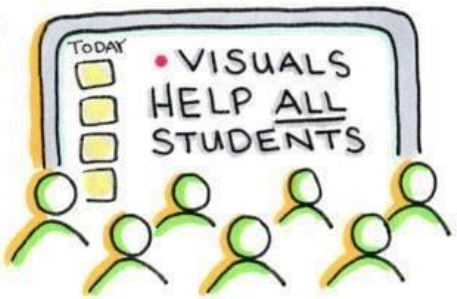
• VISUALS ALLOW TIME FOR LANGUAGE PROCESSING



• VISUALS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR TRANSITIONS



• VISUALS HELP KIDS SEE WHAT YOU MEAN



• VISUALS HELP ALL STUDENTS



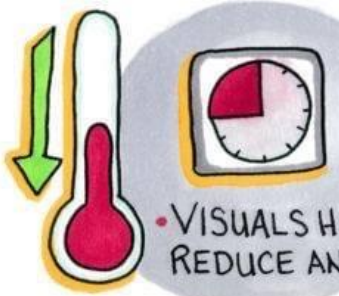
• VISUALS HELP BUILD INDEPENDENCE



• VISUALS ARE TRANSFERABLE BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE



• VISUALS HAVE NO ATTITUDE
· NO TONE · NO FRUSTRATION
· NO DISAPPROVAL



• VISUALS HELP REDUCE ANXIETY

Coventry SEND Support Service

What can help at home?

- Consider creating a safe space for your child where they can go to feel calm. This may be their bedroom. Think about the environment and what you may put in there.
- Allow children time to decompress when they come home. This is a planned time where they complete a calming activity as part of their routine. Remember, this is not a reward - it is a strategy for calming and shouldn't be removed.
- Consider using sensory resources and tools that help your child to regulate. Some children like low/coloured lights, soft cushions or weighted blankets for example.
- Use visuals and planners in the home environment as well. These can be useful for children to see what is coming up and to prepare themselves for events.

Movement breaks

Regular opportunities for movement breaks can give children an opportunity to step away from their desk and calm if they are experiencing a sensory overload.

At school this could be:

- Clean the whiteboard
- Hold the door open for peers
- Give out books or whiteboards.
- Jobs of responsibility e.g. taking a message to the office, pushing the lunchbox trolley etc.
- Encouraging children to walk and talk during lessons
- It can also include whole class activities as movement is good for all children.

✓ Chair push ups

✓ Stretching

✓ In pairs – pushing hands

✓ Finger yoga activities

Movement breaks

At home this could also look like:

- Going for a run
- Jumping on the trampoline
- Bike rides
- Yoga/stretching
- Unloading shopping from the car

Any questions?

