

Supporting Your Child With Visual Timetables

Dr Ruth Arnell, Educational Psychologist
October 2025



TORBAY COUNCIL

1

Welcome & Aims

- What is a visual timetable?
- Why it helps children's communication and regulation
- How to use one at home



TORBAY COUNCIL

2

What is a Visual Timetable?

Shows what will happen and when

Uses pictures, symbols, or objects

Supports spoken language



3

School Visual Timetable Examples

Full day

9:15 - 9:30 Registration	9:30 - 10:30 English	10:30 - 11:30 Art	11:30 - 12:30 Maths
12:30 - 1:30 Lunch	1:30 - 2:00 Music	2:00 - 2:30 Exercise	2:30 - 3:30 Story time

Morning

Register	English	Break time	Maths	Lunch
----------	---------	------------	-------	-------

Afternoon

Guided reading	Art	Circle time	Assembly	Home time
----------------	-----	-------------	----------	-----------

Sequence Strip

- put on apron
- get paints
- paint picture
- tidy up

Full morning in school - activities

Monday	register	carpet time	English	maths	drink and snack	playtime
--------	----------	-------------	---------	-------	-----------------	----------

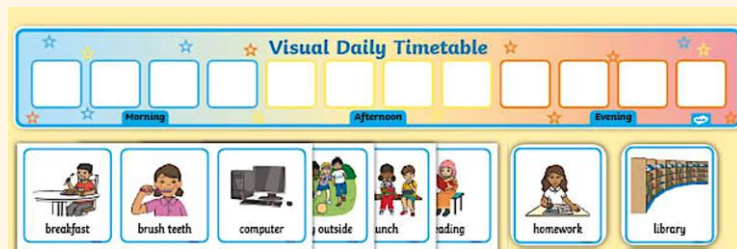
Full morning in school - who and where

Friday	
Mrs Smith	classroom
Mr Patel	table work
Mr Patel	sensory room
friends	lunch
Mrs Smith	hall
Parents	home

4

What It Might Look Like

- **Full-day strip timetables:** A long strip showing the sequence of major daily events, using either symbols or photos. For example:
 - Breakfast → Get Dressed → School → Playtime → Lunch → Story Time → Home.



TORBAY COUNCIL

5

What It Might Look Like

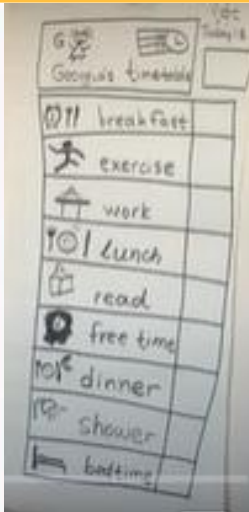
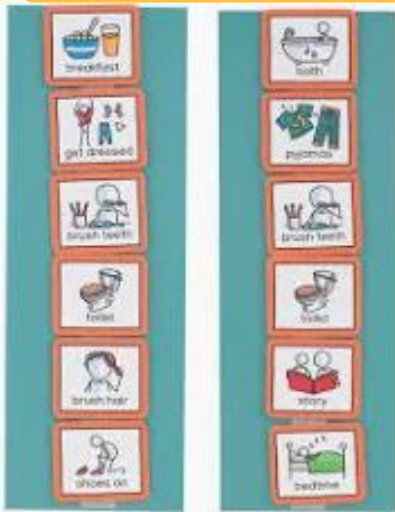
- **Routine-specific timetables:** Focused on just one routine, such as the morning or bedtime, with 3–6 clear steps shown in order.
- For instance:
 - Put on pyjamas → Brush teeth → Toilet → Story → Bedtime.



TORBAY COUNCIL

6

Home Visual Timetable Examples



Morning & Bedtime routines

Checklist

TORBAY COUNCIL

7

Home Visual Timetable Examples



You can use for more than one child and personalise to their interests / needs.

TORBAY COUNCIL

8

Home Visual Timetable Examples

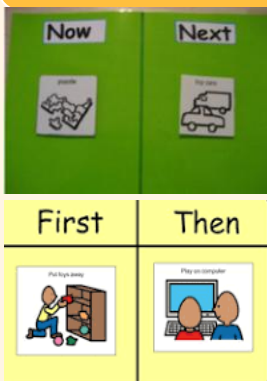


<https://gethackneytalking.co.uk/parents-activity/daily-visual-timetables/>

TORBAY COUNCIL

9

Simplifying the Visual Timetable



Objects of Reference

TORBAY COUNCIL

10

The Hierarchy of Visual Representation

Most Concrete



Most Abstract

- Real Object
- Miniature of the object
- Photograph of the actual object
- Photograph of a non-identical object
- Line drawing of the object
- Symbol of the object
- Written word of the object



<https://www.integratedtreatmentservices.co.uk/our-approaches/speech-therapy-approaches/symbolic-development/>

TORBAY COUNCIL

11

Why They Help

- Reduces stress caused by unpredictability
- Reduces anxiety and meltdowns
- Makes transitions smoother
- Builds confidence and participation
- Encourages independence
- Gives children a sense of control
- Strengthens understanding of time and sequence and memory



TORBAY COUNCIL

12

When to Use Them

- Morning and bedtime routines
- School mornings or after-school routines
- Weekend or holiday plans
- When changes are expected (trips, visitors, appointments)



Remember to be consistent!



TORBAY COUNCIL

13

How to Create and Use One

1. Choose a small part of the day (3–6 steps).
2. Find or draw pictures that represent each task.
3. Arrange them in the order they happen (left-to-right or top-to-bottom).
4. Show your child how to move or turn over each picture when finished.
5. Keep the timetable in sight and easy to reach.
6. Refer to the visual timetable throughout the routine/day.
7. Use a simple script / prompt phrases, e.g., “what’s next?”



TORBAY COUNCIL

14

Linking Home and School

- Consistency helps
- Using familiar school images and routines
- Ask school for timetable symbols or pictures
- Copy familiar words and order
- Share what works well at home
- Aim for similar routines when possible
- Keep in touch with teacher or SENCO

8.30 breakfast



8.45 clean teeth



9.00 Insert text

Insert image

9.15 maths



TORBAY COUNCIL

15

Teaching Your Child to Use It

- Make sure that your child plays an active role in deciding on the routine
- Use real photos for young children or those who need clear context
- Pair pictures with calm talking: “First breakfast, then shoes.”
- Each activity to have a clear start and a clear end
- Refer back to the timetable
- Encourage your child to check the timetable independently
- Praise your child for using it: “You checked what’s next all by yourself!”
- Keep it flexible—swap out pictures as routines change



TORBAY COUNCIL

16

Common Challenges

- Child ignores the timetable
- Wants to change the order
- Doesn't like the pictures



- The effectiveness of visual timetables depends on consistency over time, allowing even reluctant or disregarding children to benefit from their predictable structure and gradual learning opportunities



TORBAY COUNCIL

17

Consistency is crucial!



Predictability and Security

Building Familiarity Over Time

Permanent Reference and Visual Memory

Independence and Self-Regulation

Teaching Adaptation and Flexibility



TORBAY COUNCIL

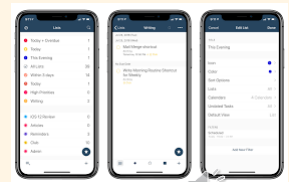
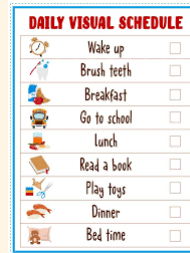
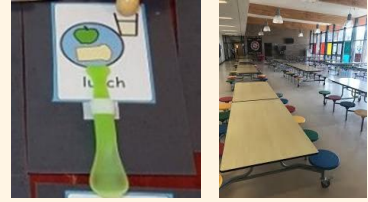
18

Adapting for Different Ages

Younger children: real photos and objects

Older children: symbols or written lists

Teens: electronic checklists or phone reminders



TORBAY COUNCIL

19

Quick Start Action Plan



What to do

- Choose one routine to visualise
- Collect pictures or photos
- Work together with school to share images
- Try it for 3–5 days
- Review what worked

Your 5-Day Visual Timetable Trial

Day	Routine Chosen	What Worked Well	What to Change	Notes/ Comments
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				



TORBAY COUNCIL

20

Final Takeaways

- Keep it simple
- Celebrate success
- Adjust as needs change

Remember to be consistent!



TORBAY COUNCIL

21

Further information



- Information about visual timetables from the NHS:
 - <https://parentcarerscornwall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Visual-timetables.pdf>
 - <https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Visual-Timetable-ammended.pdf>
- Information about visual timetables from Council for Disabled Children:
 - https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Visual%20Timetables%20Resource.l%20CAN.FINAL_.pdf
- Free printable visual timetables and daily routine charts for children:
 - <https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/printable-visual-timetables-and-daily-routine-charts-for-children/>



TORBAY COUNCIL

22