

Using Visual Timers



Time can be a difficult concept for young children. Telling a child that they have 5 minutes left at a play date or that they have to focus for the next quarter of an hour can be an arbitrary concept for them.

Even as children gain skills to tell the time, it can be helpful for some to have a visual countdown of how much longer they have to wait or how much longer they need to work.

WHAT are visual timers?

- Any form of timer which allows the child to "see" how much time is remaining from an initial set amount of time.
- There are several different styles with the most common ones being:
 - The Time Timer
 - The Time Tracker
 - Sand Timers (egg timers)
 - Cooking Timers
 - Liquid / oil timers
 - Apps or computer programs which provide timers including the Time Timer
- www.online-stopwatch.com/classroom-timers/ is a website with a variety of visual timers including images of clocks, rocket count downs, candles burning down, races and sand timers.

WHY would you use a visual timer?

- For younger children, the concept of time can be a difficult one to grasp. Knowing how much time is left for an activity or before transitioning can be difficult. Having a visual count-down can assist children in preparing themselves to complete a task and move on to the next.
- For older children, it is still helpful to "see" time pass. This can help them to
 - Focus more readily on the task at hand
 - Increase productivity over time
 - Limit anxiety associated with being unaware of "how much longer"

WHEN would you use a visual timer?

- When a child would benefit from having a more grounded concept of the passing of time
- Anytime when there is a set time limit for an activity or event
- When using a time limited reward. For example "you may use the iPad for 15 minutes"
- When encouraging a child to achieve an outcome in a set time frame - for instance, getting dressed in 10 minutes or writing a sentence in 5 minutes
- When preparing a child to transition to another activity. For example: "We have 5 minutes left before lunch break"
- When explaining to a child how much longer they will have to wait before an event, such as a swimming class or a favourite television show

Children with sensory processing difficulties benefit from being aware of what they can expect to happen next and how much longer tasks might take. This can help them to prepare their sensory systems for different types of information and therefore help them to regulate their energies, their focus and their behaviour.

