

Help Sheet

0 – 25 Specialist Teaching Support Service

How to use a Busy Box

Why?

A Busy Box is a basket or box of activities designed to develop specific skills, such as fine motor skills or early learning concepts (e.g., colours, numbers, letters). Its primary purpose is to foster independent learning through repetition of explicitly taught tasks.

Busy Boxes can:

- Encourage children to engage in adult-initiated activities.
- Help children grasp the concepts of 'start' and 'finish'.
- Provide additional practice for newly acquired skills.
- Promote workspace organisation and task completion without adult assistance.
- Enhance attention skills



How to prepare the Busy Box?

- Encourage the child to help decorate a box or basket.
- Attach a photo of the child or their name to personalise it.
- Identify a special place in the classroom to store the box. If developing communication skills, consider placing it out of reach to encourage the child to ask for it



How to use the Busy Box?

- Always start with something the child enjoys, preferably a specific toy or activity from the classroom. You might need to be creative and use a favourite character like Spiderman or Peppa Pig as a motivator.
- Ensure tasks are short in duration initially to promote success. Introduce one activity at a time to the child, making it fun rather than a chore.
- You may need to negotiate using 'first' and 'then'. Ensure the second activity is a motivator, something the child likes.
- An adult should support the child initially. Once the child is comfortable, the adult can gradually withdraw support as appropriate

Things to Note

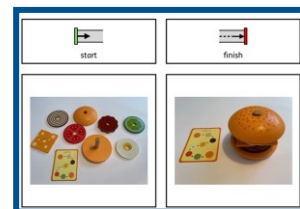
- It is essential for an adult to model the new task or activity that has been explicitly taught to ensure success.
- It is crucial to ensure the pupil experiences a sense of success when working independently on these activities. This promotes engagement, motivation to complete subsequent Busy Box activities, and helps develop their self-esteem

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How to extend?

- Once established as part of the daily routine, a Busy Box can facilitate a range of skills. For instance, a child may need to practise fine motor activities, so you might include threading and lacing activities. You might want to develop basic skills such as colour recognition; activities could include matching and sorting. The range of activities is limitless and should be tailored to the individual child's needs.
- Place individual activities within their own zipper wallets or containers so that part of the exercise involves organisation and tidying up.
- Sequence tasks using a task plan or list (this could be attached inside the lid of the Busy Box) and attach matching pictures to the zipper wallets or containers to develop pre-reading skills.
- Increase the number of individual tasks or the complexity of each activity. For instance, once a child is independently completing a simple threading activity, extend to a more complicated one.
- Encourage the child to get involved in choosing tasks to put in the box.



What activities can I include?

- Puzzles (jigsaws, mazes, find the...)
- Matching activities: colours, patterns, pictures, letters, words, initial sounds, rhymes
- Cutting (simple outlines, snips in thin card)
- Colouring (with a key theme, e.g., all pictures beginning with a given initial sound, all rhymes)
- Dot-to-dots
- Tracking
- Continuing patterns
- Sorting
- Shape activities
- Counting
- Threading
- Sequencing
- Name card activities
- Motivators (bubbles, character toys, or worksheets)



Evidence base – informed by:

- [Fine Motor Skills and Academic Achievement | Psychology Today](#)
- [How to Make and Use Busy Boxes by Tracy Smith, LMSW ECCP Consultant](#)
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/blog/how-to-make-busy-boxes>