Using a Spot/Countdown Timer – Information Sheet

What is a spot/countdown timer?

Spot/countdown timers are a visual way to help support a person to understand how long they have left before a task finishes. Spot/countdown timers are like a sand timer - the difference is you are in control of how long the task takes and you can change how quickly the tasks ends, e.g. if the person is finding the task challenging, you can remove the spots more quickly so they still achieve finishing the task but in a shorter time. The spot timer adds a visual element to the verbal language you are already using to manage how the task is being carried out.

When should I use a spot/countdown timer?

A spot/countdown timer could be used in the following situations:

- When a person finds it challenging to concentrate on a task – the timer can show them how long is left.
- When a person is unable to understand verbal language and needs to know when a task is ending.

How do I make a spot/countdown timer?

Materials needed:

- 2 contrasting colours of paper or card

- Laminator

- Velcro loops and hooks

1. Consider the colours you choose and make sure they contrast well.

2. Cut out a circle approximately 15-20cm diameter. Laminate this.

3. Cut out 5 smaller circles and laminate them.

4. Stick 5 piece of Velcro loops spaced evenly around the edge of the circle.

5. Stick 5 pieces of Velcro hooks on the back of the small circles.

How do I use a spot/countdown timer?

- At the start of the activity, attach the spots to the circle and place it alongside the student so they can see it. You can use a symbol for the activity that you are carrying out if you wish.

- Explain to the person the activity they are carrying out and that this will be finished when all the spots have gone.

- As the person completes the activity, gradually remove the spots. You can change how quickly or slowly you remove the spots depending on how the person is responding the activity. The key is that the person reaches an end point and has success at finishing a task.

- As you take the spots off, some people like verbal language used alongside this, e.g. 'another spot gone', others prefer just seeing the spots removed.

- When you get to the last spot, verbally acknowledge this, e.g. 'writing nearly finished.'

- When you remove the last spot, verbally acknowledge this and what is happening next, e.g. 'writing finished, now choosing time'.
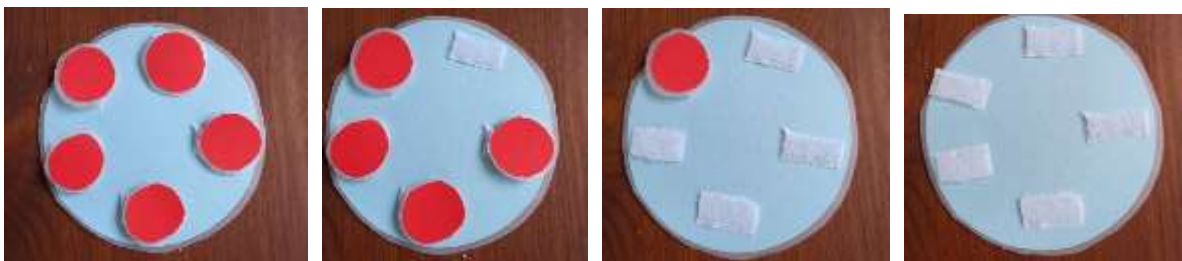
- Spot/countdown timers can be used alongside other visual support methods such as visual timetables and now next boards.

- Spot/countdown timers can be used to gradually increase the time a person is able to follow an adult led task.