

“First → Then” Board Tip Sheet

A “First - Then” board is a strategy that can be used to visually communicate instructions or expectations to a child. “First-Then” boards can help alleviate anxiety related to transitions or changes in routines. “First - Then” boards can reduce repetitious verbal instruction.

Teaching “First - Then” Boards.

- **Teaching the concept:** Place pictures of two preferred items on the board (“First bubbles - Then lego”).
Do not make any demands. Have fun and gently introduce the concept.
- **Increasing the expectation:** Once the child understands the concept of an imposed schedule, place a picture of a neutral or less preferred activity in the “First” box and a highly preferred activity in the “Then” box (“First puzzle - Then bubbles”).
Show the child the “First - Then” board and point to the pictures while giving the verbal instruction.
If the child does not follow the instruction, redirect their attention to the “First - Then” board. Avoid verbal repetition of the instruction.
- **Managing Resistance:** The child may initially resist following the expectation. It is important that the “Then” activity not be given until the “First” activity has occurred.
If necessary, the expectation for the “First” activity can be reduced. For example, one puzzle piece with assistance instead of the whole puzzle independently.

“First - Then” Board Tips

- Keep the “First - Then” board visible to the child at all times. Some children need to check that the expectation is still the same.
- If the child is having difficulty with a change in routine or a transition from one activity to another; redirect their attention to the “First - Then” board.
- Avoid repeating verbal instructions by pointing to the sequence on the “First - Then” board.
- Using standard size boards with velcro allows flexibility. Pictures can be changed as needed and the boards can be used in multiple locations.
- If the child has difficulty understanding line drawings, “First - Then” boards can be used with photographs, with miniature concrete objects or with the actual object.
- “First - Then” boards can also be used with children who ask repetitive questions or need constant reassurance about the routines.