

Using First-Then

Children's Developmental and Behavioural Supports



What is a first-then approach? First-then is a way to set up an instruction or task to motivate a child to complete it. First-then is based on the "Premack Principle", where you take something the child is likely to do or something they prefer to do, contingent on something they are unlikely to do (Cooper, Heward, Heron, 2019). We call it first-then because it follows the language we would use when giving an instruction, for example, "first brush your teeth, then we can go outside". A first-then board, is a visual representation of these statements.

When do I use first-then?



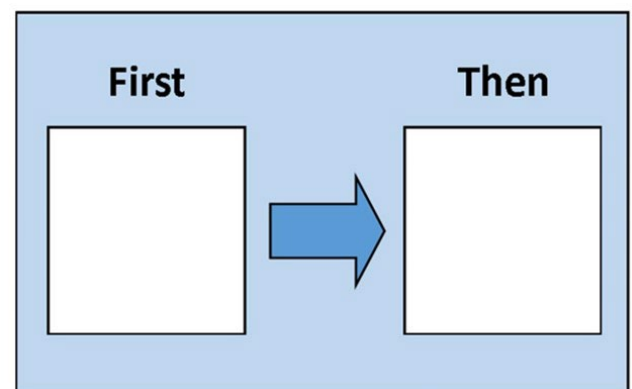
You can use first-then anytime you want to motivate your child to complete a difficult or undesired task, by offering an enjoyable activity once the task is completed.

You can also use first-then to assist with transitions and use a first-then board to help the child visually see what is happening next (e.g., "first eat dinner, then watch a movie").

How do I make a first-then board?

To make a first-then board, try the following steps:

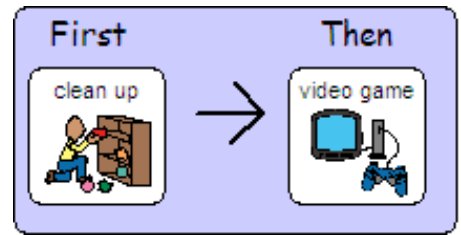
- Choose an undesired or difficult task that the child must complete and create a picture or symbol (e.g., clean up, brush hair). The task must be something the child is capable of doing!
- Take pictures or create symbols of several tasks that are highly motivating to the child (e.g., using the iPad, the park, a cookie)
- You can laminate the pictures or cover them with clear tape to make them more durable.
- You can affix the pictures to a sturdy board using Velcro, sticky tac, or paper clips; add the words, "First" to one side, then arrow, then add the words "Then".



How do I use a first-then board?

To use a first-then board, try the following steps:

- Place the undesired or difficult task in the First box, place the motivating picture in the Then box.
- Show the child the board, label and point to the First task they must complete.
- Label and point to the motivating Then task that will follow.



Remember: It is important once the undesired (first) task is completed that the motivating (then) task immediately follows!

References

- Children's Autism Services of Edmonton. n.d. *First-Then Board Tip Sheet*. <https://childrensautism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/first-then.pdf>
- Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2019). *Applied Behavior Analysis, Global Edition*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Kerry's Place Autism Services. n.d. *The Simple and Powerful First-Then Strategy*. https://www.kerrysplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/6_9754_kerrys_dwnld_05.pdf
- Lentini, R., Vaughn, B. J., Fox, L., & Kwang-Sun Blair (2009). *Creating teaching tools for young children with challenging behavior* (3rd edition). Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida.

Additional resources

- Geneva Centre for Autism <https://www.autism.net/resources/visual-gallery>
- OCALI [https://www.ocali.org/project/resource_gallery_of_interventions/page/first then board](https://www.ocali.org/project/resource_gallery_of_interventions/page/first_then_board)
- ConnectABILITY <https://connectability.ca/visuals-engine/firstthen-board-popup/>

Information

If you need more information, visit www.durham.ca/CDBS

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