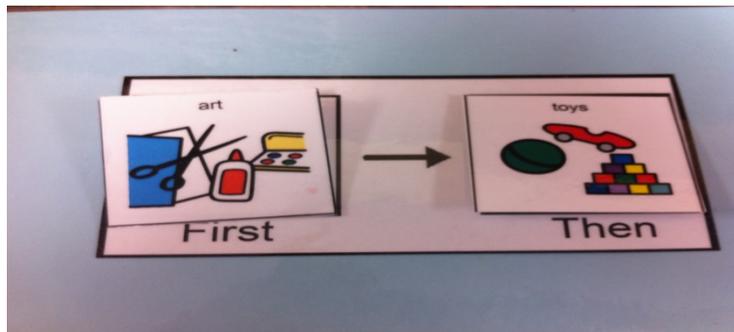# First-Then Board

Tip Sheet

What is it?

A **first-then** board is a visual tool that is based on the principle that a person's motivation to complete a less preferred activity is increased when it is followed by a more preferred activity. Using a first-then board will provide the child with a visual means of introducing new tasks, activities, or events in a manner that the child understands and may be more motivated to complete. This tool assists with creating a structured and predictable environment for children. It also allows them to choose an activity.

Why is it Important?

A first-then board may be used to:
- increase independence,
- provide predictable environments/activities,
- clarify expectations while providing sequencing of events,
- support transitions (activity to activity or between locations),
- reduce verbal information (prompts) provided to child,
- increase motivation for completing an adult directed task/activity, and
- prepare the child for using a visual schedule.

Things to Consider

Prior to introducing this visual, it is important to consider the following:
- What is the goal of the first-then board for the child?
- Have strong motivators or preferred items/activities for the child been identified?
- Does the child already respond to symbols, pictures, or text?
- Does the child constantly ask questions regarding accessing a preferred item/activity, when a scheduled event will occur, or require reminders about the routines?
- Does the child sometimes refuse to complete certain activities?

How to Use a First-Then Board

1. Decide which activities/items are preferred by the child. The child will assist with the selection of the last activitiy.
2. Ensure the tasks/activities the child is required to complete matches their ability. When introducing a first-then board, start with a neutral item/activity followed by a highly preferred item/activity.
3. Remember when introducing a first-then board, it is important to set up the child for success. Prompts can be used to assist and support the child to complete the activity prior to moving on to the preferred item/activity. Be sure to fade prompts.
4. Present the first-then board to the child by labelling and pointing to the sequence on the first-then board (e.g., "First work, then computer").
5. Ensure the preferred item/activity is available for the child when the work is completed.
6. It is important that the THEN step immediately follows the completion of the FIRST step. The duration of the preferred activity should be shorter than that of the work/non-preferred activity.

Tips and Strategies

- Avoid repeating verbal instructions. Instead, point to the sequence on the first-then board.
- Ensure child's attention has been secured when introducing the first-then board.
- The first-then board works best when powerful items (reinforcers) are paired with less preferred activities. Similarly, if the activity is neutral, use smaller or less powerful reinforcers.
- Do not allow access to the reinforcer if the child has not completed the first task/activity. If the task provided to the child is particularly difficult or non-preferred, consider modifying it so the child only has to complete a part of it before accessing the reinforcer. For example, if tidying toys is challenging, only require them to put away 1 or 2 blocks before allowing access to the reinforcer. Over time, increase the expectation.
- Keep the first-then board visible to the child at all times. Some children need to verify that the expectation remains the same.
- Remember to work towards increasing independence. The child can use the board to complete the task/activity and move to the reinforcing item/activity with minimal assistance.
- A first-then board can be prepared in various formats: photographs, miniature objects, actual concrete objects, or texts.
- A first-then board can be used in conjunction with a choice board where the child will be given an opportunity to choose the item/activity they will receive afterwards (reinforcement).

References

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Lentini, R., Vaughn, B.J., & Fox, L. (2005). *Teaching tools for young children with challenging behavior.* Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Early Intervention Positive.