

What are First/Then boards?

'First/Then board' (also known as 'Now & Next') are a type of visual support. The board consists of two sections; what the child is asked to do **'First'** and then what the child can **'Then'** do once they have completed the first activity.

Both activities are represented visually either through the use of objects of reference, photos, pictures or symbols. For Early Years children we recommend using objects or photos.

Why do we use First/Then boards?

First/Then boards are really helpful for helping children to understand and follow directions and for making things predictable.

They can help children understand what is going to happen and make it easier to move from one activity to another. Some children might not want to stop doing an activity they really like – but seeing a picture showing them that another activity is going to happen next, can help them to move on. Knowing what is going to happen next can reduce anxiety.

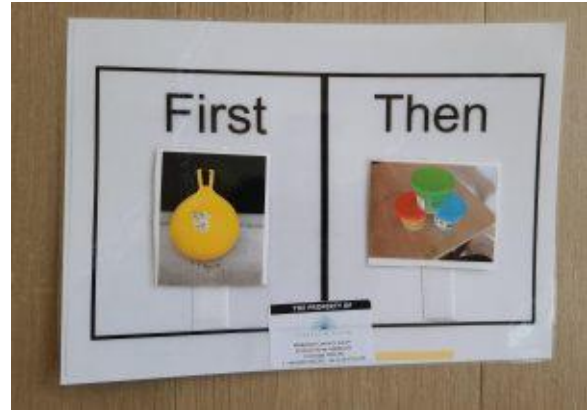
They can also be used to motivate a child to do an activity that they do not like as much, by showing them when they can do what they enjoy.

How do I make a First/Then board?

Take pictures of all the activities that the child likes or gather objects to represent these activities. Eg: cars, water play, bubbles, blocks, animals etc. Also, take pictures of, or gather objects that represent the daily routines the child takes part in every day, Eg: snack time, washing hands, toilet/nappy change, outdoor play etc.

Laminate and add Velcro to the photos and create a First/Then or Now & Next board. (Examples are included at the end of this advice sheet.) Add Velcro strip in each box and some on the back to store the photos not being used.

If using objects, find a bag to store the collected objects in and a transparent 'zip lock' bag to place the board and objects in.



How do I use a First/Then board?

Decide what the child will do first, and then decide on the preferred item or activity for them to have afterwards. The preferred item or activity needs to be motivating enough that the child wants to follow your instruction.

It can work well to start using a First/Then board with a sequence the child already knows, for example 'First coat on...Then outside'. This way, your child will find it easy to move from the first activity to the next.

Put the visuals, such as objects or photos on the board.

Get down on the child's level, show them the First/Then board and point to each image and say "First... Then...." pointing to the symbol as you name the activity. For example, you might say "First wash hands, Then snack".

Support the child to engage in the first activity, reinforcing "first...then..." by pointing to the pictures if necessary.

When they've completed the first task, you should refer back to the board, for example saying "washing hands finished, time for snack" then immediately provide/lead them to the second activity. If you don't provide it straight away, the child may not trust the First/Then board.

Top tips:

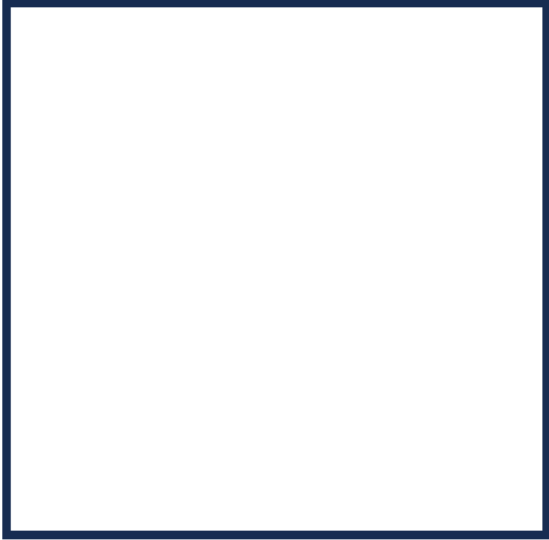
Always name the picture/object you are showing them.

It is helpful to initially start with activities your child enjoys, so they are more willing to accept the First and Then board.

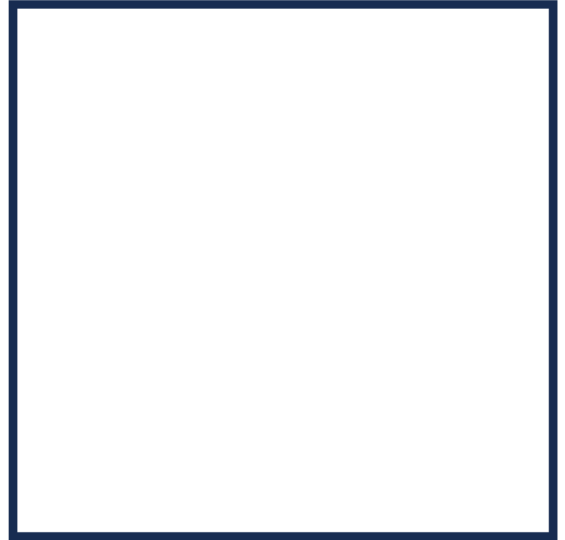
Place an enjoyable activity in the "Then" box when encouraging the child to complete a less desirable task.

Use the board regularly throughout the day, so the child can become familiar with it. Remember change can take time, so keep at it.

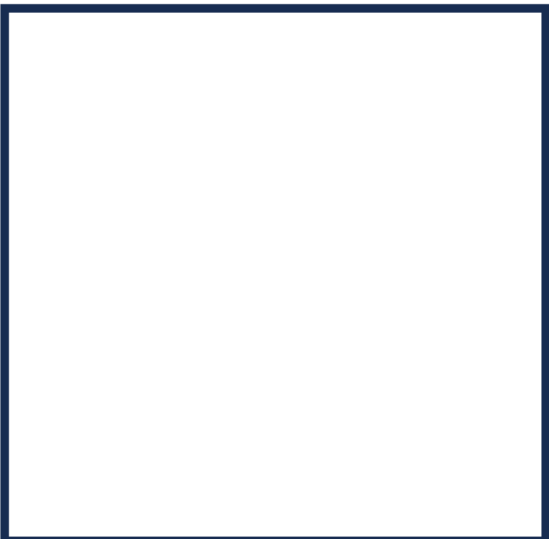
First



Then



Now



Next

