First Then Boards

Why use visual supports?

- Visuals remain when spoken word "disappears"
- Visuals direct and hold attention
- Visuals allow more time to process information
- Visuals can support learning language
- Visuals can support memory
- Help adults slow down their spoken language
- To support understanding
- To be build independence
- To reduce anxiety
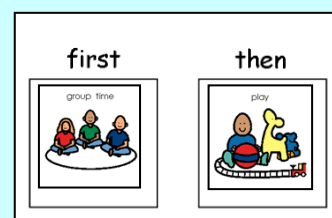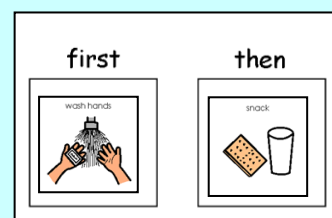
First Then boards can:

- Provide a simple visual structure
- Prepare a child for using a visual timetable
- Reinforce natural routines e.g. toilet then wash hands, wash hands then lunch etc.
- Support the child to engage in a less preferred activity followed by a motivating activity
- Let the child what is expected and what they can expect to happen.

Creating a First, Then Board

- First then boards usually use photos of symbols, but objects can be used if this better suits the child's needs.
- Print, laminate and add Velcro to symbol or photos.
- Create a first then board as in the image below.

How to use a First, Then Board

1. Show the child the board saying "*First… then….*" pointing to the symbol as you name the activity.
2. Support the child to engage in the first activity, reinforcing "first…then…" by pointing to the pictures if necessary.
3. When the first activity is finished or it is time to move on to next activity remove the first symbol with the child saying "*…has finished, it's time for …*"
4. Support the child to transition to this activity

Top Tips

- The use of simple predictable language alongside the first then board can support the child to generalise understanding of this language even when the symbols are not there.
- The first then board is best created to be moveable so the board can remain with the child in variety of situations to help the child "see" what's going to happen and reduce anxiety e.g. "first wash hands, then snack" or "first walk then park".
- If using the first, then board to support the child engaging in a less preferred activity it is important that practitioners seek to identify and respond to why this is activity is not favoured by the child e.g. are there sensory challenges, difficulty understanding, do not have skills needed etc. This is particularly important if they are communicating that they are unhappy, which may be through their actions and behaviour.