



**Using 'First and Then' to support your child**

**'First and Then' is a strategy that can be used to help your child:**

- Understand what is going to happen first and then prepare for what will happen next
- Prepare for transitions and changes in routine
- Develop understanding of spoken language
- Reduce anxiety and behaviour that can sometimes occur if your child is feeling unsure about what is going to happen
- Provide continuity and consistency especially if 'First and Then' has been used in your child's early years setting or if recommended by the Speech and Language Therapist

✓ Using a 'First and Then' strategy can help to encourage your child to complete simple everyday activities that they may not want to complete by providing a 'reward' for when they have completed the activity.



✓ The 'First' part is usually something that your child finds it hard to do and the 'Then' part is a simple reward or something that your child wants to do.

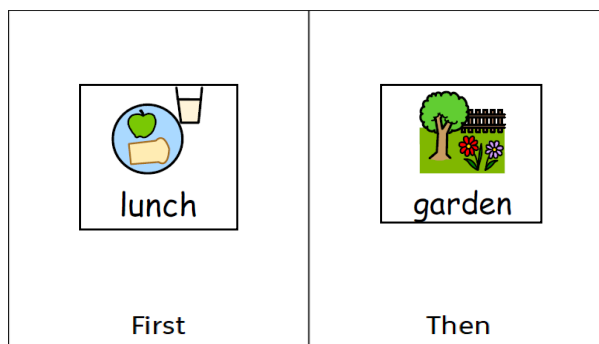
✓ You can use visuals such as objects, photographs or pictures alongside spoken words.

✓ Decide when in the day you would like to try using 'First and Then' and try to be consistent in using the strategy at these times ~ this includes encouraging everyone in your home to use the strategy with your child.

✓ Try to use 'First and Then' when it is calm and quiet ~ Turn off and put away all electronic devices.

✓ Keep language simple and give your child time to process the instruction.

✓ Build up gradually to using 'First and Then' especially if it is the first time you are using this strategy. If it does not work, try again in a few minutes or another time.





## What you need



A 'First and Then' visual schedule (one of the following):

- Printed visual First / Then schedule.
- Piece of A4 paper with a line in the middle and the words 'First' and 'Then' written on each side.

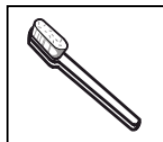


Two sets of visuals to hold in front of the 'First and Then' schedule. One set will represent the activity you want your child to complete and the second will be the reward:

- Objects
- Photographs
- Pictures

Pick one **type** of visual from the list above ~ what you use will depend on your child's level of understanding.

### Activity



### Reward





A container to store the visuals:



You might like to have two containers: One for the activities and one for the rewards.



A Finished box to place the visuals into when the activity is finished:



Try to use a different box or container to the one where you store the visuals.

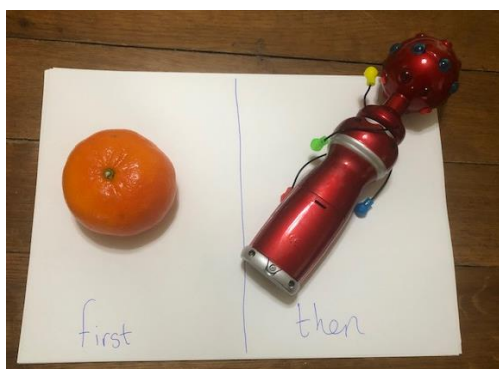
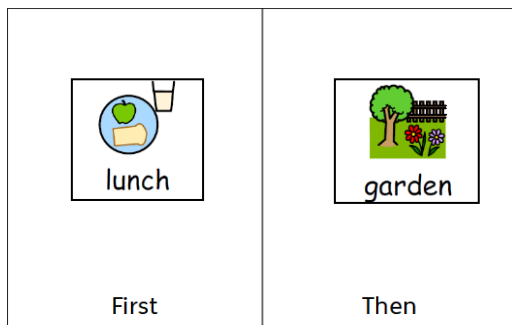
*Whether you use objects, photographs, pictures or just words, decide when you are going to use the 'First and Then' strategy and think about the rewards that you might use.*

*Get the visuals ready each morning for the key events or activities that will be happening throughout the day.*

*Use the strategy consistently to help with **transitions.***



## How to do it




1. Have the visuals ready and nearby ready to show your child.
2. If your child is very absorbed in an activity, it might be helpful to give them some warning that the activity is about to finish e.g. **'last one'**, or **'one more minute'**.
3. When you are ready, either hold the 'First and Then' schedule or place it near your child.
4. Hold or place the visual which represents the **activity** on the **'First'** side and the visual which represents the **reward** on the **'Then'** side.
5. Say your child's name, try to obtain their eye contact.
6. **Show** by pointing to or holding the visuals one at a time.
7. Say **'First [with the name of the activity], then [with the name of the reward]'**,  
e.g. **'Aaron, first brush, then car'**.  
Give your child a few seconds to process.
8. Take the 'First and Then' schedule with you along with the visuals to the activity. Place them nearby so that your child can see the visuals ~ you can allow your child to hold the visual for the activity.



9. When the activity is finished, take your child to the finished basket, or bring it to your child.

10. Place the visual for the activity in the finished basket or encourage your child to do so.

11. Say '[Name of the activity] **finished**, [name of the reward] **time / now it's** [name of the reward]', 



e.g. '**Brush finished, car time / now it's car time**'.

12. Give your child the reward.

13. Put the visual representing the activity away ready for the next time.

You can be flexible in how you use 'First and Then'. If you do not have the basket of visuals or the 'First and Then' schedule to hand, just use the objects that you have in front of you and hold them out side by side as you say '**First and Then**'.



*What if my child does not show a response when I show them the First and Then visuals?*

- ✓ Wait a couple of seconds for your child to process the instruction ~ they might need some time to respond especially if they are absorbed in something else.
- ✓ Repeat the instruction to see if they respond.
- ✓ Watch your child closely when you show them the 'First and Then' visuals. If they look at the visuals and seem interested, hold out your hand to see if they approach you.
- ✓ Try to respond immediately when your child shows a response ~ take them to the activity straight away so that your child learns the connection between you showing them the 'First and Then' and the activity.
- ✓ Leave the 'First and Then' visuals in view of your child and try and again a few minutes later.
- ✓ If your child still does not show interest, try again at a later time.

*What if my child wants to hold the reward visual?*

- ✓ You can let your child hold the visual for the reward, but you can also give them the visual for the activity too. As your child holds the visuals, repeat the 'First and Then' phrase so that they are hearing the words '*First and Then*'.



## When to use 'First and Then'

- ✓ You can use 'First and Then' at any time of the day however suggested times are to support with transitions as part of the daily routine.
- ✓ At times when your child is refusing to move from an activity but you want them to do something, you can use 'First and Then', e.g. if your child is playing with a car and you want them to brush their teeth, you could try using the visuals and say '**First teeth then car**'.
- ✓ The 'First and Then' strategy can also be used to support with turn taking, e.g. '**First Mummy's / Daddy's turn, then Saima's turn**'.
- ✓ When your child is consistently responding to 'First and Then', you can consider moving toward using a Visual Timetable ~ refer to the Visual Timetables in the Home information sheet.

## To find out more / Useful links

- If your child has a Speech and Language Therapy programme or report, a 'First and Then' strategy may have been recommended. Refer to the report for further guidance.