Creating a First-Then Board

While multi-step visual schedules work well in some instances, some children may need a simpler type of visual support to learn expected behaviors and routines. First-Then boards are an effective way to help children who need support following single and two-step directions and routines. Review the steps below to guide your creation of a First-Then board.

1. Make a base for your First-Then board. This can be two differently colored pieces of construction paper laminated together, side-by-side.

2. Gather a set of pictures that represent the various routines, expectations, and activities the child needs help with. For example, if the child you are making the First-Then board for needs help remembering that they must wash their hands after using the toilet, make sure you have pictures that represent these two tasks.
3. Print, laminate, and cut out pictures so they are readily available for your First-Then board.

4. Use Velcro strips or dots so the pictures can stick to the base.

Now you are ready to use the First-Then board. You can use these a few different ways with children. For some children, you may place one picture on each side of the board as you discuss the two steps or activities, “First, we have circle time,” [as teacher point to the circle time carpet], “Then we play outside,” [as teacher points to the picture of the playground]. For other children, you might consider placing the “First” picture only on the board, and once they have completed that step you can add the “Then” picture. Finally, some children may understand that there are two steps or routines to complete before their final step. Experiment with what works best for the child you created the First-Then board for, and remember to always pair rich language input and social-emotional support with the use of visual tools.

One step before then task:

Two steps before then task: