First, Then

ibestt
early childhood

What Is It?

"First, then" is an individualized antecedent strategy. During "first, then" an adult delivers a clearly stated expectation (e.g., "First, sit down), followed by a statement about the preferred item or activity the child will earn when they follow the expectation (e.g., "Then, you get iPad"). When the child completes the expectation, the adult immediately delivers the preferred item or activity. This strategy helps adults deliver clear expectations and ensures the child knows what desirable item or activity they will get for completing an expectation.

When to Use It

- Use "first, then" for behavior that is maintained by avoiding an activity or task.

- Use "first, then" when the child has the skills to do the task, but instead engages in challenging behavior

- Use "first, then" with tasks that are well defined (e.g., sitting down, picking up paper, standing in line).

- Use "first, then" only when the adult can provide the preferred item or activity the child earned by completing the request.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

After identifying a task or activity the child is trying to avoid:

☐	1. Determine whether the activity or task you are asking the child to do is culturally, developmentally, and individually appropriate. Make changes to simplify, change, or remove problematic activities or tasks.
☐	2. Determine a variety of preferred items that are child-specific, highly desired by the child, and likely to increase the appropriate behavior in the future.
☐	3. Select an activity or task that typically results in child challenging behavior.
☐	4. Deliver the request for the activity or task that typically results in challenging behavior and state the desirable item or activity to be delivered upon the completion of that activity or task (e.g., "When you sit on your carpet square, you can be the calendar helper," "First trace letter A, then you can swing").
☐	5. Deliver the desirable item or activity immediately upon completion of the undesirable activity or task.

Example

Jin-sun typically runs around the preschool classroom during snack time. Jin-sun's preschool team determines that Jin-sun is running to avoid eating the typical snacks provided by the preschool, such as apples and goldfish crackers. The team reaches out to Jin-sun's family to find out what he likes to eat at home and learns that he prefers the Korean snacks that his mother makes. They decide to serve Jin-sun snacks that are more familiar and preferred. Before snack time, Teacher Antonie tells Jin-sun, "First sit at the snack table, then you get gyeondgan (rice cake ball)." As soon as Jin-sun sits at the snack table, Teacher Antonie provides him with gyeondgan. Teacher Antonie finds other snacks familiar and preferred for Jin-sun and rotates them. Before snack time, he frequently tells Jin-sun, "First sit at the snack table, then you get _____." After Jin-sun sits at the snack table several days in a row, Teacher Antonie fades the intervention by using first, then language every other mealtime.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- State the "first, then" request in positive terms. Avoid using negatives like this: "If you don't sit down, you don't get your iPad."

- Clearly define the expectations for the activity or task and the parameters of the reinforcer for the child (e.g., how long it will last, where the activity will occur).

- Never add additional task requirements to the initial request before delivering the desirable item or activity.

- Use a variety of desirable items or activities to maintain their value over time.

- When possible, give the child a choice of desirable items or activities and have the child select the one that is most preferred.

- Consider using visual icons or pictures of the first, then request for children that have difficulty understanding one- or two-step directions.

Resources

Center for the Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (2010). Tips and ideas for making visuals to support young children with challenging behavior.

Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence. (n.d.). Resource gallery of interventions: First then board.