Newsome
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

First-then board

Show the plan. Then keep the deal.

First

Card here (tape or a hook-and-loop dot)

Then

Card here (tape or a hook-and-loop dot)

All done Put finished “first” cards here.

General information, not advice about your child. Written and reviewed by Joshua Newsome, M.A., BCBA®. newsomebh.com

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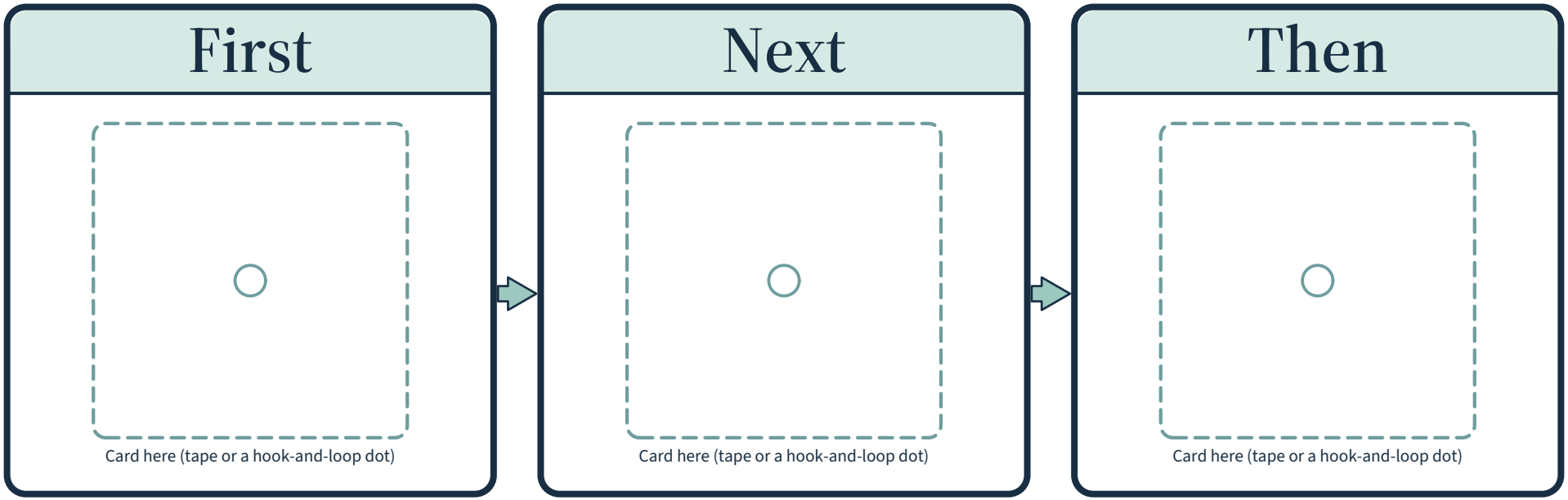
First-then board

Later: two steps before the “then”.



When first-then is easy, try two steps before the “then”. Go slowly; if it falls apart, go back to two boxes.

All done Put finished “first” cards here.

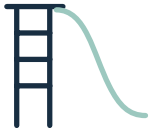
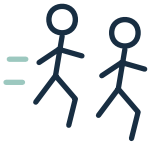
Picture cards

Cut along the dashed lines. Use tape or hook-and-loop dots. Blank row: draw it or add a photo, like your child's own shoes.

First cards

 Shoes	 Coat	 Brush teeth	 Bath	 Wash hands	 Toys away
 Get dressed	 Pajamas	 Car seat	 Homework	 Clean up	 Get in the car

Then cards

 Park	 Slide	 Bubbles	 Song	 Book	 Blocks
 Drawing	 Chase game	 Piggyback	 Outside	 Playdough	 Show

Your own

 Draw it or add a photo	 Draw it or add a photo	 Draw it or add a photo	 Draw it or add a photo	 Draw it or add a photo	 Draw it or add a photo

How to use your first-then board

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5 steps

1. Pick a “then” your child wants right now. Offer a choice of two.
2. Make the “first” small and doable. Start easy.
3. Put both pictures up before you start. Point as you talk.
4. Say it once, calmly: “First ___, then ___.” Wait five seconds.
5. Keep your promise. Give the “then” right away, every time.

Later: make the “first” a bit bigger, use words instead of the board, and step back if it falls apart.

Never the “then”

Meals, water, the bathroom, sleep, comfort, or a comfort item. Leave mealtimes out of first-then.

If the “first” doesn’t happen

The “then” waits, the offer stays open, and comfort comes first. A “no” that keeps coming back is information: the task may be too hard or scary, or your child may not feel well.

4 ways it backfires (and the fix)

- **A deal offered mid-meltdown.** Fix: set it up before; calm first; same plan after.
- **A “then” too far away.** Fix: right after.
- **A “first” too hard.** Fix: smaller, show, together.
- **A threat.** Fix: say what they’ll get.

When to get help

- First-then never seems to work
- Dangerous behavior
- Your child hurts self or others
- It gets in the way of school, sleep or family life
- A sudden change (check with your child’s doctor)
- You feel stuck

In danger now? Call 911 or your local emergency number.

Small pieces such as hook-and-loop dots, magnets and laminated cards can be a choking hazard. Keep them out of reach of children who put things in their mouths.

General information, not medical, clinical or educational advice about any individual. Talk with a qualified professional about your own situation. Written and reviewed by Joshua Newsome, M.A., BCBA®. BCBA® is a registered trademark of the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, Inc. (BACB®). Watch the video: [VIDEO-LINK].