How to introduce a visual timetable

Six steps for teachers, educators and families

1

Start small

Begin with two cards (a now and next or a first-then board) or just the morning. Add cards as the child gets used to it.

2

Use the real thing first

Show the card and the real thing together: hold up the snack card at the table, the shoes card at the door.

3

Same place, same order

Keep the timetable where children can see and reach it, top to bottom or left to right, and go through it at the start of the session.

4

Point at every change

Before each change, point to the next card and say it: “Story is finished. Next is outside.” Then move the finished card.

5

Show changes before they happen

Swap a card when the plan changes, using the “Something new” card for a surprise, and say why.

6

Hand it over

Let children move the cards themselves, then check their own strip. The aim is a child who knows what comes next.

Good to know

- Use the same picture for the same thing at the setting and at home.
- Keep it for knowing what comes next, never as a reward or a behaviour chart.
- Some children need it for a long time, and that is fine: it is a tool, not a test.