



Choose Time Boxes

What is the Choose Time Box?

- You may have noticed a period called 'choose time' in the structure of the day. This period can have many names such as free flow or non-directed time, but regardless of what it is called this is a period in which the children in the setting can choose to engage in any of the stimulating play activities available in the setting, with the adults following the play of the children to create fun and interesting learning opportunities.
- However, some children can struggle during these times in a number of ways. Some only choose a very restricted range of activities, minimising the benefit they could receive from exploring other play opportunities in the area. Some children become 'paralysed' by the choice available and don't make any choice at all, whereas some don't really know what to do during these sections of the day or how to make a choice. For these children a choose time box intervention can be very helpful.
- A choose box will contain either pictures of activities or objects of reference (i.e. objects that represent an activity; such as a marble that represents playing with a marble track). A child can look through these pictures to choose one that represents the activity they would like to engage in. This item is then placed on the choice board (a laminated A4 sheet with 'My Choice' written on it) so that the child knows that they have chosen to engage in this activity.
- When the child is finished they should return to the board, take the picture, place it into another box with the word 'Finished' written on it. This box should be sealed and have a slot in the top in which to place the picture as this is the 'Finished Box' where a child places activities that they have finished.
- If there is still time left in this choose time period the child can then choose another activity from the choose box and the process repeats itself again.
- Once the child has placed an activity in the finished box, they cannot choose that activity again in the same day or choose period, depending upon the needs of the child.
- Not only does this method help children through a period of the day that they might find difficult, it also helps them to communicate their choices to an adult and begin to make the connection between making a choice and the consequence of that choice, promoting non-verbal reasoning and independence.
- The finished box also ensures that children explore a wider range of activities than they might normally during free choice periods, whilst also helping them to understand the concept of things being 'finished' for the day (or for that choose time) but being available again the next.



Choose Time Box FAQ's

There are some issues that can arise when using the choose box method that number of potential questions for the practitioner; these are explored below...

- *Should I 'make' the child play with what they have chosen if they lose interest in the chosen activity and go to do something else?*
 - I would say that if a child wanders off to play with something else then that is their choice and it would be unethical to 'make' the child do something they don't want to do during a period which is supposed to be a free choice. However, the practitioner should ask the child if they are 'finished' with the activity and if the child indicates 'yes' they should be led to the choose board, asked to place the current activity in the finished box and choose another activity from the box.

- *What if a child wants to choose an activity that is not in the box?*
 - This is fine as one of the main reasons for the implementation of the choose box is to help children elicit choices; as such the child should be allowed to make the choice and a picture should be made to represent this new activity in the box. Another note on this would be to say that if a child is able to make consistent and clear choices verbally, then it may be worth considering whether they need this intervention at all!

- *How long should a child be able to spend on a chosen activity?*
 - This answer to question is really down to what you want to achieve with the child. If you want the child to engage in more activities than they currently do or work on their ability to elicit choice through frequent use of the choose box then perhaps setting a time limit for each activity would be prudent, with the child being warned when they get to the end of an activity by a timer or something similar. However if the setting feel that having the child elicit one choice per choose time is enough then there is no need to impose a time limit.

- *What if a child becomes distressed because they want to do an activity that is finished?*
 - This is a distinct possibility when using the choose box. However it is also an important point of learning for the child that they are not always able to do what they want when they want and that they need to explore a wider range of activities. You can reassure the child that they will be able to choose it again tomorrow (or next choose period depending on how the choose box is implemented for that child) but that for now it is finished. Remember that we are trying to teach children the skills they will need for the more formalised academic settings of Key Stage 1 & 2 where there will be less free choice and more adult directed time; this is a comparatively less demanding and more structured way of getting them used to this than simply waiting until they transition and expecting them to cope.