

Teaching Your Child to Wait

"Just wait a second" is one of the hardest things to ask of a child who hasn't built the skill yet. Waiting isn't something kids are simply born knowing how to do, it's built gradually, a few seconds at a time, the same way any other skill is.

"A five-second wait, done successfully, is a bigger win than it looks like."

HOW TO TEACH IT

- 1 **Start absurdly small.** Literally 3 to 5 seconds, and build up gradually from there as it gets easier.
- 2 **Use a visible or audible marker for the wait.** A timer or counting out loud, so it's not an open-ended unknown.
- 3 **Reward the wait itself, not just what comes after it.** "You waited so nicely!" while handing over the item.
- 4 **Practice during easy, low-stakes moments.** Not just the hardest ones, like waiting for a turn on something high-value.

BUILDING IT UP

- ☐ Increase the wait time slowly, a few seconds longer every few successful tries, not all at once.
- ☐ Vary what they're waiting for, so the skill generalizes rather than only working for one specific thing.
- ☐ If a wait goes badly, shorten the next one rather than abandoning the practice altogether.

TRY THIS

"Wait" plus a visible timer for just a few seconds, followed immediately by the item and enthusiastic praise the moment the timer ends: "You waited! Here you go."

MAKING WAITING PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Use natural waiting moments that already happen, a microwave timer, a red light, a turn in a game, as practice, not just planned drills.

Narrate your own waiting out loud sometimes, so they see it modeled: "I'm waiting for the water to boil."

Keep celebrating small waits even once bigger ones are possible, it keeps the skill strong.

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