

Waiting Is Not Forever



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You spend lots
of time waiting.



You wait for food.

You wait for
your turn.

You wait for someone
to come back.



Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Toddlers live in the moment. When they want something, they want it *now*. But learning self-control and delayed gratification will set young children up for success in school and in social settings. Practicing *patience* is the key.

Teach “wait.” Toddlers are still learning language and don’t fully understand concepts like “soon,” “later,” or “not yet.” You can help by consistently using “Wait, please” as a refrain. When your child makes a request, say, “Sure! Wait, please.” Slightly delay as you retrieve the asked-for item or prepare the upcoming activity, and then say, “Ready!” Praise your child for waiting. Over time, you can increase the delays while keeping language flowing: “Oops, I forgot one thing,” “Silly me, I dropped this,” or “Oh, I’m so slow today. Thanks for being such a great waiter.” Notice learning opportunities each day: “We are *waiting* for the bus.” “Let’s look around while we *wait* in this line.” Compliment your child on being patient.

Use timers. Young children may need a visual timer to make the idea of time passing more concrete. They learn that when they see or hear the timer go off, they get the item they’ve waited for. At first, make the waiting period short (a minute) so the reward comes quickly. Gradually lengthen the amount of time as your child learns what to expect.

Rely on routines. Young children need plenty of sleep, nutritious meals, frequent playtime, and lots of exercise to grow healthy and strong. Making these routines a part of each day not only fosters good health but also decreases your child’s frustration level.



As you know, most toddlers don’t handle frustration and confusion well! They’re still learning self-control, and they need help managing their moods. Keep their environment predictable. Daily routines, including “waiting time,” can teach your child what to expect and build a sense of independence. Your child will be calmer, and so will you.

Limit the use of screens. It’s tempting to hand young children an electronic device to keep them busy in the car, store, or waiting room. But using screens as a distraction makes your child more reliant on them. Without a screen, children stay in tune with their surroundings, learn to entertain themselves, and build both focus and creativity. Waiting can be bonding time—you and your child can talk, sing, play I Spy, or snuggle.

Make a “waiting kit.” Be prepared for long rides and waiting rooms by creating a collection of age-appropriate toys you bring out only during these occasions. No need for anything fancy or expensive. Dollar-store items, stickers, puzzles, and art supplies can do the trick. Because the items come out only during “waiting time,” they seem more special. Have fun!