



FREE RESOURCE 02

Waiting Is a Skill

Helping Young Children Practice Waiting

Waiting develops through experience.

Children wait for turns, meals, appointments, siblings, and adults. These everyday moments give them opportunities to practice a skill that develops gradually.

Wait Without Screens does not mean children should struggle through waits without support.

Adults can help make waiting understandable and manageable without automatically removing the wait.

How can adults help children practice waiting?

START SMALL

Offer short, realistic waits before expecting longer ones. Waiting develops through practice.

MAKE IT CONCRETE

Tell children what will happen next: "Two people are ahead of us, and then it is our turn."

NAME THE FEELING

Acknowledge the difficulty: "You really want your turn. Waiting can be hard sometimes."

LEAVE SOME SPACE

Talking and playing are wonderful, but children also need occasional chances to simply be without entertainment.

NOTICE PROGRESS

Keep it matter-of-fact: "You waited while I finished talking." Children can notice their own growing ability.

MATCH THE CHILD

A toddler, preschooler, and older child will not have the same capacity to wait. Let expectations grow with the child.

We don't have to eliminate every wait.

Children learn to wait by experiencing waiting in manageable ways. Sometimes we can support them with conversation or play. Sometimes we can acknowledge that waiting is hard. And sometimes, they can simply wait.

Waiting is learned, not simply expected.

Small, everyday waits give children repeated opportunities to build tolerance, flexibility, and confidence.