RESEARCH

BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN

RESEARCH BRIEF 01

Serve and Return

Why back-and-forth interactions matter

> **“The human brain expects this game of back and forth, and it is essential for healthy development.”**
>
> **Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University**
> *Serve and Return: Back-and-Forth Exchanges*

What does serve and return mean?

A child looks, gestures, points, babbles, speaks to you, or asks a question: that's a **serve**. A caring adult notices and responds with a look, words, or an action: that's the **return**. These everyday exchanges support language, relationships, and development.

What does this have to do with waiting?

Waiting can offer natural moments for connection. A toddler points to a bus. An adult follows the child's attention and says, 'That bus is stopping.' The child responds, and the conversation continues. No special materials are needed.

What can adults notice?

A child's gaze, gesture, sound, expression, question, or comment can be an invitation to respond. Follow the child's lead when possible. It isn't about filling every moment with entertainment.

THE CONNECTION TO WAIT WITHOUT SCREENS

Everyday waits can create opportunities for responsive, back-and-forth interactions.

ORIGINAL SOURCE
Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University
Serve and Return: Back-and-Forth Exchanges

WaitWithoutScreens.com/research
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