

LADC Behavior Handout



Teaching Your Child How to Wait

Discovery ways to teach your child how to wait in order to prevent problem behaviors.



Teaching the skill of waiting, helps teach your child to self-soothe.

Teaching the Skill of Waiting

The skill of waiting is an essential skill that all children need to practice and perfect during early childhood. Waiting can be hard for children because they may not understand the concept of time, they may have poor impulse control, waiting may increase anxiety for not knowing when they will get access to their preferred item, or maybe your child has learned that if they throw a tantrum, they don't have to wait as long.

Teaching children to wait is teaching them how to self-soothe when they are unoccupied or desiring a preferred item. Teaching children to wait is teaching them how to tolerate the delay of access to reinforcement, whether that is food, toys, activities, or parent attention. Many aggressive or problem behaviors result from your child's inability to wait or use self-calming strategies. It is important for your child to learn this skill now, in early childhood, as it is a pivotal skill and will impact your child's ability to learn other skills in the future. By teaching the skill of waiting, you will see a decrease in your child's problem behaviors.

One important thing to note is that by providing your child with electronics during wait time, you are hindering your child's ability to learn those self-soothing skills. Children need to learn that they are capable of entertaining themselves or soothing themselves for a short amount of time. By providing electronics to occupy them, we are taking away those opportunities to practice those skills.

Teaching Waiting Through Turn-Taking!

Children are not born with the skill of turn-taking and must be explicitly taught. When children learn to take turns, they also learn other important skills such as being a good friend, self-control, problem-solving, patience, communication, listening, and negotiation.

You can make just about any activity into an opportunity to practice turn-taking. Take turns during board games, large motor games, stacking blocks, going down the slide, using the swing, racing a car down a track, scooping sand into a bucket, or wearing special glasses. Any time your child is motivated to do something or play with something, there is an opportunity to practice turn-taking.

If your child has siblings, they would present a natural opportunity to practice turn-taking on a daily basis. If your child does not have any other siblings, then you may want to create playdate opportunities with neighbors, cousins, or other children from school. You can also contrive turn-taking opportunities between you and your child; however, it is beneficial to also practice with other children so that your child will generalize their skills to all situations.

How to Teach Waiting

Step 1: Collect Baseline Waiting Time

Before we begin teaching your child how to wait, we need to collect some data to determine how long they are able to currently wait before they engage in whining, aggressive behaviors, grabbing the preferred item, screaming, crying, or starting the activity. Maybe your child can wait 20 seconds, maybe they can wait 45 seconds, or maybe they can only wait 5 seconds. Whatever amount it may be, it is important to gather this information before we begin so that we know where to start.

Step 3: Plan the Activities to Practice Waiting

Determine which activities might be the easiest to practice waiting. Based on your time and schedule, you could choose to either schedule a time to practice multiple opportunities of waiting in a successive time period, or you can practice waiting during normal situations that present themselves throughout the day. Either way, you need to plan ahead so you are prepared.

Scheduled Time

When you schedule a time to have multiple opportunities for practice, you would want to make sure that you are using something that your child would be motivated for. You could use snack time and only provide small amounts of the snack and have them wait for more. You could use an iPad game or video that your child likes and let them watch a little bit of it, pause it, and then have them wait a certain amount of time before they get to watch it again. Then repeat. You could also use preferred toys, games, or parent attention.

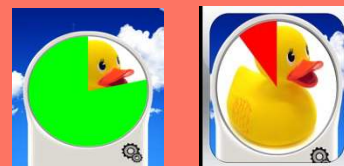
Natural Environment Practice

You may feel like it might be easier to just practice during naturally occurring times of the day when it would be expected for your child to wait. You could do this around mealtime, in the car, when playing games, when trying to get an adult's attention, when playing with siblings, waiting for a turn at the park, and many more situations. Think of your daily routine to find daily waiting opportunities.

Step 2: Introduce your Child to the Visual Timer

Often children don't understand the concept of time and therefore produce problem behaviors because they become uneasy by not knowing how long until they will get what they are waiting for. One way to help with this is to use a visual timer that visual tell them how much time is left to wait. You can get access to free visual timers through the app store on most smart phones.

Teach your child that when it is green, there is still a little bit of time left but when it is red, they are almost done waiting. There are two really great benefits when using this specific visual timer:



- 1) This visual app slowly shows a picture as it is counting down, this can initially help distract your child and help them be more successful during the waiting time.
- 2) Using a visual timer such as this one allows for you to change the waiting time; however, it won't change the visual image for your child so you can gradually increase the waiting time without them noticing.

Step 4: Pick the Starting Time and Practice

If your child can wait 20 seconds right now, start them at 15 seconds. If they can wait 30 seconds right now, start them at 20 seconds. Start your child at a time frame a little less than what they are already capable of so that they can be successful and get access to the reinforcement (which is usually the item or activity they were waiting for). Overtime, you will slowly increase the amount of time they have to wait after they have been successful at the current amount of time, 3 consecutive days in a row.

Variations

After they have become successful using the visual timer, you could switch to other methods for waiting visuals to generalize the behavior. You could try to have your child use a sand timer instead. The only difficulty with this is that you wouldn't be able to modify the amount of time that they wait. Maybe wait to introduce this until they are able to wait up to 3 minutes and buy a three-minute sand timer. Another method would be to have your child count to a certain number while waiting. This would give them something to do while waiting and allow you to practice waiting wherever you are, even if you don't have the other materials prepared. You could also have your child wait for the duration of a song.

After they have gotten good at practicing with a visual timer or sand timer that slightly occupies them while waiting, you could switch to a visual signal or cue to have them wait and then allow them to practice waiting without any distractions or assistance. This will truly help them to practice their self-soothing skills. It may be beneficial to prepare a visual menu of choices for your child to learn independence on what to do when waiting for attention.