

# Waiting...and waiting and waiting

## Tips for helping children learn to wait

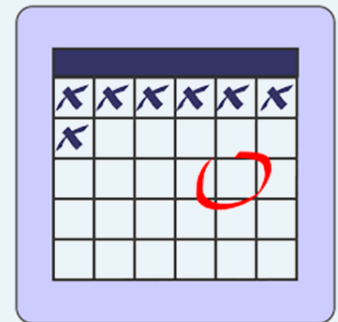


Children, especially younger ones, typically are not very good at waiting when they are looking forward to something. They don't yet understand the concept of time and often lack the tools to cope with impatience.

Below are some ideas that parents and other caregivers can use to help kids understand time and cope with having to wait.

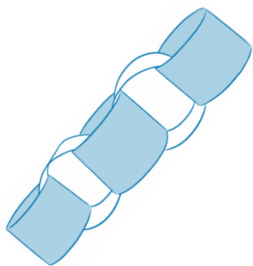
### Calendar with pictures or symbols for when things are happening:

You can X off days that are over so the child knows which day is today. This is good for birthdays, visits with family, when school starts or stops, when vacation is happening, and holidays. If the child is enrolled in extra-curricular activities, this can help them see when practices, games, and performances happen.



### Waiting for days or weeks until something happens:

Make a paper chain and cut a link off each day (or week) so the child sees time is running out. Consider the length of the chain and the child's attention level to determine where to start. If the paper chain is too long, the child will get impatient, frustrated or lose interest. Tell the child when there is only one circle left, then it will be time for the event.



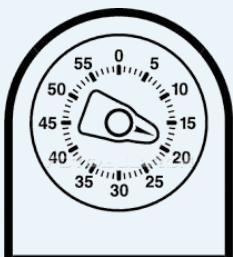
### Waiting for a specified time in a few weeks:

Plant a seed in a cup or flowerpot and water a little each day. When it sprouts, or blooms, or produces fruit/vegetables, it is time for the event the child is waiting for! Be sure to check seed packets carefully to see how many weeks until it sprouts or blooms or produces food so you get the timing right.



### Use an auditory timer for shorter waits (under 1 hour):

Whether it's a wind-up kitchen timer, the timer on the stove or microwave, an alarm clock, or a timer on your phone or tablet, using an auditory timer can help children hear when time is up. Preschools often use timers to signify that play time is over and it is time to clean up or time to come in from the gym or playground. This could be used at home to signify clean up time or time to stop playing and wash hands for dinner.





## Use a Visual Timer for shorter waits (less than 1 hour)

- Sand timer—you may have one in the kitchen or in a board game. Most egg timers and timers in games are just a few minutes. You can purchase larger sand timers from [Lakeshore Learning](#).
- Liquid motion bubble timer—these are helpful for measuring turns with toys or tablet games.
- Time Timer—this timer looks like a clock and visually shows how much time is left on the timer in red. The timer will beep when the time is done.
- Mouse Timer—an app available for [Apple](#) or [Android](#) devices that starts a countdown of the amount of time you choose.

## Waiting for the new baby to become a playmate.

Children are often told how they are going to be a Big Brother or Big Sister and teach the new sibling all kinds of things...

...then the baby comes and only sleeps, nurses, and cries, leaving the older sibling wondering how they are supposed to teach this baby anything!

**It helps to explain that the baby has some more growing to do and tell them when the baby will become a playmate.** Baby

can sit up at about 4 months. Baby can walk and say a first word at 10-14 months. **Try to find a holiday close to the right time** so you can tell them that the baby will be able to sit up at Christmas or when summer vacation begins. And remember that there are many other ways that kids can help before then, such as fetching diapers, wipes, rattles or pacifiers.



## Helping children cope with waiting often involves *what to do while waiting.*

- If it is a short wait, can they play with a toy, watch a TV show or look at a book?
- A **wait card** can give them something to hold on to while they wait. Letting them hold the admission tickets to get in gives them the reassurance that they can walk away or do something else while they wait for a turn and they won't miss out.
- If it is a longer wait, like for a new baby, a move to a new home, or the first day of school, are there things they can do to help get ready? **Making a list of steps to get ready and checking them off can be helpful.** Younger children may need a picture list if they cannot read.