

# It's Worth the Wait!

## The Power of Waiting During Interactions with Your Child

You've probably heard that talking to your child is critical for their language development. But did you know that **not talking** sometimes is just as important?

When children are learning to communicate, they need many opportunities to start interactions, and they often need extra time to send their messages. If adults do all of the talking, children don't get a chance to start an interaction and they don't have enough time to think before sending their message. That's why one of the best things you can do during interactions with your child is to **WAIT expectantly**.

### Waiting expectantly means...

- ⌚ Stop what you are doing
- ⌚ Observe your child and notice what they're interested in
- ⌚ Be face-to-face with your child
- ⌚ Listen and watch for your child's message
- ⌚ Wait quietly, without talking (for up to 10 seconds)

### Waiting...

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**Keeps the conversation going** – When you wait for your child to start an interaction, and then respond by saying something back, you then wait again. This lets your child know that it's their turn to do or say something again, and this keeps the interaction going back-and-forth.

1

**Shows your child that their message is important** – When you stop what you're doing, face your child and wait, it shows them that you're interested in what they want to show you or tell you. We all communicate best when our listener seems interested in what we have to say!

3

**Helps your child start an interaction** – When your child starts an interaction, it gives you something to respond to. And when you respond encouragingly to your child's message, you not only provide language they can learn from, but language that matches their interests. This motivates them to keep communicating.

2

**Gives your child the extra time they might need** – Children who are learning to communicate often need extra time to understand our messages and then think about the message they want to send. Waiting patiently and quietly gives your child the time they need.



## What are you waiting for?

When you wait, you're encouraging your child to take a turn in the interaction. What their turn will look like depends on their stage of communication. Your child's turn could be very subtle and easy to miss, so that's why it's important to observe and listen closely while you wait.

What your child's turn might look like:

- ✓ Looking at you
- ✓ Reaching for something or reaching towards you
- ✓ A body movement, such as jumping
- ✓ Giving you something (to show it to you or to ask for something)
- ✓ Pointing or other gestures
- ✓ Making sounds
- ✓ Using words or sentences

As soon as your child takes a turn, stop waiting and respond by doing or saying something about what your child has just communicated. Responding to your child's message immediately lets your child hear words that match their message, which is very helpful for language learning.

## Tips for waiting

In adult conversations, speakers talk back and forth with very little time between their turns (only 200 milliseconds on average!). So pausing and waiting for up to 10 seconds might be harder than you think. Here are some tips to guide you:

1. Get down to your child's physical level so you can easily face your child. This lets your child see that you are waiting, and lets you see your child's message.
2. Lean in and look expectant, letting your child know that it's their turn.
3. Count to 10 silently (in your head) while you wait. Of course, if your child takes a turn after only a few seconds, respond!
4. When your child sends a message, respond right away and wait again.



Parents are often amazed at what their child is capable of when they are given a few extra seconds. Not only do they send new messages, but they're often motivated to keep sending messages when their caregivers wait more often. Give it a try.... you'll likely discover that it's worth the wait!

For more information on waiting, and to hear from a parent about the difference waiting made for her child, visit [www.hanen.org/worththewait](http://www.hanen.org/worththewait)