

Change Waiting Time to Play Time

Let's face it, it's frustrating and boring to have to wait, both for children and for adults. It doesn't put anyone in a good mood. But there are ways to change boring to fun, by turning waiting time into a chance to learn and connect.

Prepare

There will be many times in family life when you have to wait: at the doctor's office, in a restaurant, at the check-out in the supermarket. The time spent travelling by car or bus is another kind of waiting, especially when traffic's bad. You know ahead of time that your children will likely get bored and restless in these situations. If the waiting lasts too long, they'll probably start to misbehave. When you're prepared, you can prevent problems. You'll give your children a better way to get your attention than whining. You'll be ready with a better game than "tease my brother and make him cry."

Change the mood

A few simple techniques can change the mood. Think about what helps *you* get through a boring time. Something to look at? To listen to? To think about? These will work for children too, though they will also like an opportunity to move. Older children can do more thinking and talking; younger children will need more direction and involvement from you.

Most of the following suggestions don't require any equipment, apart from sometimes pencil and paper. You can adapt them to the age and interests of your children and to the place where you're waiting.

Songs - Learn the words to some songs or make up your own about what you'll do when you've finished waiting. When you add verses to familiar songs, they can last a very long time. For instance, try "The ducks on the bus go quack, quack, quack." and see how many animals you go through. Sing songs with hand gestures to get everyone moving.

Word Games - Play vocabulary and memory games. For instance, each person takes a turn choosing a letter and saying "I went to the pet store and bought an animal whose name started with ...". The others have to find an animal that will fit. Try the grocery store and the florist's when you run out of animals. Older children can play "Hangman" or "Tic-Tac-Toe" with you on a paper placemat.

Thinking games - Look around you and find two similar objects, two trees, for instance, and talk about how they are the same and different. Play a game of hide and find by laying out sugar packets on the restaurant table and hiding a coin under one. Get your child's attention by asking "crazy" questions: What would happen if a dinosaur wanted to ride a roller coaster?

Stories - To pass the time, you can tell a traditional story or make one up on the spot. Or you can invent a cooperative story: each person tells a few sentences then passes it on. In a doctor's waiting room, choose a picture in a magazine and make up a story about it. Ask your children where they would like to visit in the picture.

Conversation - Take advantage of waiting times to learn more about your children. Talk about their favourite things. Plan their next birthday party with them.

Art - Draw pictures on each other's hand or back and guess what the other person drew. Look at billboards or advertising and talk about lines and colours.

Movement - If you are in a place where there is room to move and there are two adults, one person can hold the place in line and the other can take the children for a follow-the-leader walk. If the children must sit, look for ways to move at least their arms and hands, like clapping games or twisting pipe cleaners into odd shapes.

Props - If you know you're going to be stuck waiting someplace, pack a bag with some things like pencils, crayons, paper, play dough, little cars and books. Don't forget a small snack, always a good way to change the mood. You could write song titles, the names of games or conversation topics on little pieces of paper then put them in a box. Keep the box in the car and when you're in a traffic jam, ask children to draw a piece of paper out to decide what to do.

Next time you have to wait, take the opportunity to relax and play with your children. Boredom, impatience and anger will make your waiting time seem longer, but having fun can make time fly.

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For more "anywhere" games, see <http://pbskids.org/lions/parentsteachers/resources/anywhere>