



Wait Time

Wait time is a strategy that can help your child learn how to listen and respond to spoken language. When speaking to your child, using wait time will help them understand that you are expecting an answer from them. After giving your child a request or command, wait for seven to ten seconds. This pause gives them the time they need to understand and act on what you have asked them to do.

Wait time is often paired with another listening and spoken language strategy. This strategy is called expectant look. Expectant look consists of raising your eyebrows, shrugging your shoulders, leaning in, or using other body movements that help your child understand that you are waiting for an answer from them. When wait time and expectant look are used together, it can be very effective for your child. They will understand the importance of turn-taking and that they need to respond in conversations they are a part of.

Wait time gives your child the amount of time they need to understand your request or question and follow through with their own statement or action. Wait time also helps your child learn their role in a conversation.

In this video clip, notice how the adult uses a wait time with this child before repeating her directions. Using wait time helps your child understand that there is something expected of them, whether it's giving an answer or following a direction you give them.

Wait time is a strategy you can use any time you are speaking with your child. Wait time is longest when your child is at a younger listening age. For very young children, wait time should last between 7 and 10 seconds. As your child continues to grow in their listening and conversation skills, wait time will naturally start to shorten.

When talking with your child, ask a question that needs a response. You can ask your child to verbally answer your question or physically do something. If you use the strategy of expectant look, it will help your child start to learn the role of turn-taking and that she is expected to be a part of the conversation.

For 7 to 10 seconds, count silently in your head as your child works on understanding what you've asked her to do. If your child doesn't respond within that wait time, you can ask again, and help if needed. If your child is not able to respond after three times of asking, don't repeat the question again. This might mean that your child does not understand what you are asking, and more prompts might cause your child to be frustrated.

In this video clip, notice the use of wait time followed a few seconds later by the help of a touch, and the child then follows through on responding to the command to put her toys away.



Parents, family members, therapists, teachers, and anyone who works with or takes care of your child can use the wait time strategy. This strategy is easy to use and doesn't require a lot of training. Teach your family members how to use this strategy to help them support your child's listening development. It is important to be consistent to improve your child's listening and understanding of spoken language.

The first step is to identify your reason for wanting to use the wait time strategy, and the specific issue you would like to work on. For example, to help your child understand their role in a conversation or to increase your child's responses to questions or commands.

Second, set a SMART goal to help you take the next step. A SMART goal is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and it has a deadline for you to act on your goal.

For example, if your goal is to use the wait time strategy, a SMART goal might look like this:

Specific: I want to help my child respond to commands.

Measurable: I will use the strategy when I tell my child to pick up his toys.

Achievable: the goal should be something you feel confident you can do.

Relevant: the goal should be relevant to you, for example, I want my child to respond to my commands so I don't need to repeat myself so often.

And Time-bound, you have a deadline for acting on your plan, such as I will use the strategy every day before dinner, starting today.

Third, think about potential barriers you might experience that could keep you from acting on your goal. For example, do you get distracted or do you have a busy schedule and might this cause you to forget to start using the strategy? Do you need more resources or instruction to help you understand more about using the strategy? Maybe it feels unnatural to you to use the strategy.

Finally, problem solve potential barriers. For example, you can teach family members the strategy so you can support each other, you can incorporate the strategy into everyday activities, you can practice with a friend, or you can discuss your concerns with a professional you trust, such as your speech-language pathologist, early interventionist, deaf educator, or audiologist. This will help you manage challenges more easily if they occur. You can better help your child when you are able to cope with barriers as they arise.