



I Can Wait a Little

When you need to eat but your child wants immediate play, keep the family response consistent. Name both needs, make a promise you can keep, and offer a small choice that helps your child wait.

Helps Your Child Grow

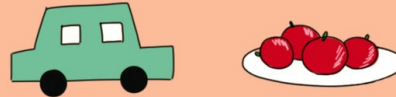


Emotional & Behavioral Self-Regulation

Experiencing a consistent limit, receiving comfort, and choosing what to do while waiting gives your child early practice shifting attention and managing behavior with adult support.



What You'll Need



Two clear choices

What You'll Need

1. Two or three choices that fit your family's limit



Name Both Needs

You arrive home hungry, and your child pulls you toward play. Begin by acknowledging what they want: “You missed me and want to play.” Then state what you need in simple words and make a specific promise you can keep: “I need to eat first. Then we’ll play together.”

Observations

- Stays close and gestures or vocalizes for you to play
- Hugs or leans into you after time apart

Tips

- Make your need concrete with a playful sound: “My tummy is rumbling – grrr! It needs dinner.”
- After time apart, your child may be seeking closeness as much as the activity itself. Acknowledge that connection before restating the limit.
- Choose a clear family limit you can follow consistently, such as keeping toys away from the dinner table.



Comfort Without Changing the Limit

Your child may whine or cry when play cannot happen immediately. Keep the family response consistent and ask another caregiver to offer closeness or a different activity while you eat.

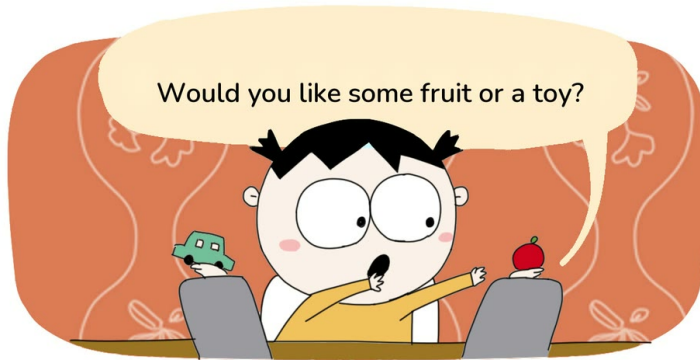
Observations

- Begins to settle when another caregiver holds or comforts them
- Raises their arms to ask to be held after hearing your reassurance



Tips

- When feelings are intense, hold your child if they want to be held and use a steady, soothing rhythm while the feeling passes.
- At this age, wanting something can bring a strong urge to have it immediately. Your child still relies on adults to help them wait.
- If the crying makes you tense, take one slow breath before responding.
- A consistent response from caregivers makes the limit easier for your child to predict.



Offer a Waiting Choice

If your child still wants you, offer two choices that keep the limit: sit nearby with a favorite toy, or have a small piece of fruit with the other caregiver. When they choose, name the waiting: “You chose fruit while you wait for me.” Then follow through on your promise to play.

Observations

- Looks to a caregiver for what to do after the limit is repeated
- Shows affection by holding hands, hugging, or smiling

Tips

- Offer a familiar toy, a simple activity, or food already appropriate for this moment - something that redirects attention without changing the limit.
- Notice the behavior specifically: “You found something to do while you waited.”
- Keeping your promise helps your child experience that a short wait has a predictable ending.
- Quieter crying, a more relaxed body, or looking toward you or the offered choices can signal readiness to choose.