

WAITING

What is this developmental skill?

Waiting is the ability to delay immediate wants or needs while trusting that they will eventually be met. It is an important foundation for patience, self-control, and emotional regulation.

How does this normally develop?

Children gradually learn to wait through repeated experiences of responsive caregiving. When adults consistently meet needs after short delays, children develop confidence that waiting is safe and worthwhile.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Children who experienced neglect often learned that waiting meant needs might never be met. As a result, they may feel intense urgency around food, attention, toys, or activities because past experience taught them that opportunities could disappear.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Constantly ask, "Is it my turn yet?"
- Grab things before permission is given.
- Become distressed during short waits.
- Interrupt repeatedly.
- Hoard food or possessions.
- Demand immediate attention.

These behaviors often reflect insecurity rather than impatience.

Parenting Implications

Begin with very short waiting periods that the child can successfully complete. Use visual timers, predictable routines, and frequent reassurance. Always follow through when you promise something after a wait.

From Understanding to Attunement

Instead of asking, "Why can't my child be patient?" ask, "Has my child learned that waiting is safe?" Reliability builds patience.