# **Teaching patience**

**Source**: [www.scolastic.com](http://www.scolastic.com)

Let's face it: No one likes to wait — least of all active preschoolers who haven't yet learned why patience matters. Nor have they developed the coping skills to be able to wait successfully. Still, teaching your child patience is important. She'll need it to be successful in school and in life.

**What to Expect:**

It's tough to say how patient you can expect your child to be at each age. Some kids are naturally more patient than others. That's why it's helpful for you to observe your child and understand that for some kids, waiting comes easily, while for others it's really difficult, says Roni Leiderman, Ph.D., associate dean of the Mailman Segal Institute for Early Childhood Studies at Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. "That said, there is undoubtedly a difference between what you can expect from a three year old and what you can expect from a five year old," says Leiderman. "As your child's language skills develop and he gains more experience with waiting, you can expect him to be more patient."

"Whether your child is naturally patient or not, you can do a lot to help her learn by starting early," says Claire Lerner, LCSW, a child development specialist at the nonprofit organization Zero to Three. "Even when she's just nine or ten months old, you don't always have to immediately fix everything for her. If you do, she won't learn to hang in there during the struggle and eventually master challenges." For example, when your baby's ball rolls out of reach, don't retrieve it for her right away. Instead ask, "How can we get the ball?" and help her figure out how to do it. The same holds true as kids get older. If your child throws a puzzle piece out of frustration, say "Puzzles can be so frustrating. What if we try it together? Does that piece fit here? How about here?" Says Lerner, "Her joy at figuring it out will give her confidence that she can draw from for future challenges."

**More Ways to Teach Patience:**

Learning to wait and to take turns are important elements of learning patience. Try these skill-building strategies:

* **Model patience-** "Your child is always learning from you, so be aware of the words and body language you use when you have to wait for something," says Leiderman. Instead of acting anxious when you're stuck in traffic, put in a relaxing CD, for example.
* **Use reflective listening-** Young children don't have the words to express what they're feeling, but you can help verbalize those emotions. In the checkout line, you might say, "I know it's hard to wait. This is taking a long time, but you're doing a great job waiting." Says Leiderman, "If you acknowledge your child's struggle, he'll naturally try harder."
* **Keep expectations reasonable-** Asking your preschooler to wait an hour for food is just too long. At a restaurant, ask your server to bring bread or crackers as soon as you sit down, and have a book or quiet game handy to keep your child occupied.
* **Help her develop strategies for waiting-** When you must wait, help your child figure out what she can do to pass the time. Say, "What can we do while we're waiting? Should we sing songs or read a book?"
* **Use a timer to help your child visualize the wait-** If he is begging for a story, but you need time to finish what you're doing, set an egg timer for 5 minutes and tell him that when the bell rings, you'll read the book, suggests Lerner.
* **Consider preschool-**  "One of the real values of having your child in a program [before kindergarten](http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/collection/stages-milestones/preparing-preschool) is that she learns waiting and self-control — two foundations of school readiness," says Lerner. If your child hasn't learned these skills by the time she starts school, her impatience may draw a negative response from the teacher and other students.