

WAIT Card

A unique, distinctive icon for those using visual communication strategies



Teaching "WAIT"

When we initially are teaching a learner to request desired items, we create many opportunities for those requests. We try to reinforce each appropriate request by giving the learner immediate access to the item or activity. Once a learner is reliably and consistently requesting desired items, however, we will need to teach him that he can't always immediately get what he requested.

We all occasionally have to wait for something we want! If a learner has learned to request vocally or via PECS, then he can be taught to wait for a short period of time immediately after making a request. If conducted in a systematic manner, this teaching can result in the learner being able to wait for several minutes, even during situations where staff have not anticipated the need for waiting. The first several "wait" opportunities should take place only when the teacher can directly control how long the learner will need to wait.

Usage Guide

The basic sequence for teaching a learner to wait is:

- When the learner requests something, give him the “wait” card.
- Pause for 1 to 2 seconds.
- Take the “wait” card back while saying, for example, “Nice waiting!”, and simultaneously giving the learner the requested item.

Over time, gradually increase the wait interval once the learner is successful at the majority (90%) of “wait” opportunities of the target duration. When increasing the wait interval, a general guideline to follow is to increase by 50% of the successful interval. So, go from 2 to 3 seconds, then 3 to 4½ seconds, etc.

If the learner is not successful at a specific teaching opportunity, shorten the next wait interval so that he once again achieves success. Remain at this level for several opportunities and then systematically begin increasing the interval again.

Once a learner is waiting for more than a minute, allow him to hold or play with a small item - just like we do when we are waiting for our dentist appointment! Continue to have the learner keep the “wait” card with him.

For how long should any learner learn to wait? Remember in the “real world” we often see people having difficulties waiting, so make sure to set realistic goals. A couple of minutes for a two-year old is realistic; fifteen minutes for a 3 year old is not. A good strategy when setting goals is to look at learners in mainstream environments and determine how long these learners successfully wait.

For more detailed information on teaching “wait,” refer to pages 258 to 261 of The PECS Training Manual, 3rd Edition (Frost & Bondy, 2024) which is given to every PECS L1 workshop delegate.

For detailed information on implementing the Pyramid Approach to Education® or the Picture Exchange Communication System, contact Pyramid Educational Consultants.