

## Creating Everyday Opportunities to Practice Turn-taking

Young children often find it difficult to wait for a turn to use a toy or participate in an activity they enjoy. It takes time for them to learn how to control their eagerness and wait for their turn. To a three year old even a minute long wait can feel like ten! Adults can support children by structuring activities to help them understand when it is time to take their turn. Young children may find it easier to take turns with adults and older children who have already mastered this skill. If your child is practicing turn-taking with a same or younger aged child, you might have to remind them when to take turns.

Kindergarten teachers with a group of eager young children often guide turn taking. For example, during a 'show-and-tell' activity, a teacher may call on each child individually, "Mike it's your turn to show the class what you brought." Classroom rules often help children take turns during free play periods when they have to wait to use activities such as the water table or paint easels.

### Turns for Two

Start introducing the idea of waiting for a turn to your child during play. Construction or 'cause-and-effect' toys and activities help your child understand when a turn is over. An example of a 'cause-and-effect' toy is a 'Jack-in-the-Box', when you press the button Jack pops out of his box. Make sure you use the word turn. You can say, "It's Mommy's turn to \_\_\_\_\_. Now, it's David's turn to \_\_\_\_\_." Here are some simple activities for you to try with your child:

- *Block Building*

Put some building blocks or Lego in a bin or pile on the floor. Start building a block tower by taking turns to add a block to the tower. You can say the number or colour of the blocks being added to help your child learn to count and name colours.

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- *Lots of Dots*

Share a marker or bingo dabber with your child and take turns making dots on a page. If your child needs support in waiting for his turn, try counting the number of dots each person gets to make during a turn. For a challenge, take turns finding and highlighting a letter in magazine or news paper articles. For example, “Let’s find all the A’s. First it will be Dad’s turn. Then it will be Lara’s turn.”

- *Computer Games*

Take turns playing the “Farm Animal Sounds” game in Off-to-School. Take turns clicking on the mouse. You can also tell each other what to click on during the turn. For example, “ Jay, it’s your turn! Can you find the cow?”

- *Train*

If you have a toy train set take turns connecting pieces of the track. When the track is completed, you can take turns pushing the train along the tracks.

- *Make Some Noise!*

This is a great activity for music lovers! Create a shaker by pouring some beads or rice in a plastic water bottle. Seal the top of the bottle. Play some upbeat music and take turns shaking it. Develop your child’s counting skills by passing the shaker after a certain number of shakes.

- *Board Games*

If your child has a longer attention span, simple board games such as “Candyland” are a great way to practice taking turns. If he can count, you can try “Snakes and Ladders”.

Once your child is comfortable taking short turns with you, encourage him to play turn-taking games with siblings or friends.

## Helping Children Wait

Young children are still developing their sense of time. They need help to understand how long “soon” or “in a minute” really is without having to read a clock. Here are some concrete strategies that can help your child understand how long a turn will be. Strategies that involve counting or timers are best when turns are short.

- *Timers*

A sand timer can be used with very short turns. When all the sand is falls to the bottom your child will know it is his turn. You can set an egg timer for a few seconds or minutes. When the buzzer sounds it is time for your child’s turn.

- *Counting*

Count out loud or use your fingers. If your child can count, encourage him to join in. For example, “One....two....three....it’s Adam’s turn!”

- *Music*

Play or sing a short song for your child. When the song is over, it will be his turn. You can also recite a short nursery rhyme.

- *Quiet Activity*

Children who routinely become restless while waiting for others may be directed to do a quiet activity on their own such as looking at a book.

- *‘Fidget’ Toy*

Your child can play with a small toy figurine or piece of clay while waiting for his turn. This is a helpful way to keep your child busy when you are in a public place such as the grocery store.

## Communicating Turns

Try to emphasize the word “turn” during daily routines at home. For example, *Sally* is having her bath. Next, it will be *David’s turn*.” Your child will soon understand that a turn means he has to wait until another person is finished using or doing something before he can use or do the *same* thing. Use a combination of speech, gestures, and pictures to help your child learn to use the following expressions:

- “*My turn*”

Pointing to his chest.

Pointing to the ‘my turn’ picture in his communication book.

Practice saying the words.

- “*Your turn*”

Pointing to or gently touching the hand of the other person.

Passing a toy to the other person.

Pointing to the ‘your turn’ picture in his communication book.

Practice saying the words.

- *Flip Card*

You can create a special card to help your child during turn-taking. Take a cue card or small piece of construction paper and glue your child’s picture to one side. On the other side, glue a picture of the person he is taking turns with. You can show whose turn it is by placing the card on the table. For example, Magid’s picture is on one side of the card and Amal’s picture is on the other. When Magid’s turn is finished, he flips the card over so Amal’s picture is visible. Amal knows it is his turn.

When it is your turn, model what to do by pointing to yourself and saying, “My turn.” Another adult or older sibling can coach your child to communicate when it is his turn. If he is comfortable, this person can guide him from behind to move his arms into position and softly tell him what to say.

## Turns in a Group

When your child starts school he will have to wait for his turn during a variety of activities. In some cases, his teacher or adults in the classroom will call children up individually for their turn. If your child has a difficult time waiting, you can ask his teacher to allow him to take his turn sooner rather than later. As his ability to wait improves, she can have him wait longer for his turn.

At other times, your child will have to line up and wait for his turn. Here are some things your child might have to wait in line for at school:

- Use the washroom.
- Use the slide at recess.
- Get on the bus.
- Use the drinking fountain.

You can prepare him by pointing out lines when you are in the community. If you want him to experience waiting in a line up be sure to choose a time of day when he is well-rested and has had something to eat. Choose a place where the line will not be very long. For example, when you go to the grocery store you can say, “We have to *wait* in line for our *turn* to pay. We can look at a magazine while we *wait* for our *turn*.”

With practice and support, your child will be more ready to wait for his turn once he reaches school.

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