



## Module 13: Calendars

### I Can Hardly Wait

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Learning how to wait is an essential skill that we acquire incidentally as we grow up. In restaurants, parents explain waiting and “being good” in hushed voices, while the waitress provides crayons and paper placemats to give the children something to do. Adults cope by checking emails, chatting with a person in front of them in line, and monitoring how fast the line is moving.

Because waiting is difficult for everyone, businesses actually build-in emotional supports to help adults have patience. Music plays while we are on hold, recorded announcements assure us our call is important and we will be speaking with someone shortly. Lines fill up on the computer so we know how soon a download will be completed. Businesses wouldn’t go to the expense of developing these if we didn’t all need help “being good.”

These strategies and supports are effective because we believe that the important event we are waiting for really ***will happen***. From experience, we know that the food will arrive at our table, we will have our turn with the cashier, and our computer will be ready before long. We buy into these strategies and supports because we have faith that we will eventually get what we want.

Many students with deaf-blindness have not learned this basic concept because of an ongoing lack of incidental information. To them, waiting feels like “***no***” and they become upset. They may be unable to hear or see the cues that typical learners use to be patient and to feel reassured.

For students with deaf-blindness, the essential skill of waiting must be specifically taught. This can begin once the student starts to use a daily calendar.

## Tips for Teaching a Student with Deaf-Blindness How to Wait

1. Give it a name. Be sure to include the word and/or sign for “wait” on the short list of beginning vocabulary for emerging communicators.
2. In order for the student to understand that wait means “yes” (only later), be faithful in ensuring that the expected event actually does occur. This is the most important part of teaching the skill of waiting. The student must trust you before he can trust the word itself.
3. Use the student’s calendar to systematically build his emotional stamina to wait for longer and longer periods of time.
  - Start by using the word and/or sign for “wait” with **all** upcoming events to provide a basis for the concept.
  - Another strategy is to schedule a less preferred activity before an activity that the student wants. You can make the length of the first activity very short if waiting is an emotional struggle for the student. Assure him that the activity he wants **will** happen, by discussing it using the word/sign “wait.” Then review the sequence of the activities to come—“This and then this”—in a positive way. Be sure to follow through in the order you specified.
4. If, during waits of several hours or days, the student becomes agitated, refer to the calendar to show that the event is still scheduled. Have a discussion to reassure him that you both agree to and understand the event. This can be very calming and will build the student’s stamina for waiting.
5. Try a countdown technique for a particular event.
  - For example, one student would anxiously wait for a weekly visit with her father. His picture was on Thursday of her weekly calendar and she had frequent conversations about it with school staff.
  - However, she needed something extra to help her wait. Each Monday, her teacher gave her a velco strip with 4 brightly colored balls attached. Together, they removed one of the balls each day. The day she removed the last ball was Thursday. She loved using the countdown technique because it reassured her that time was passing and the information on her weekly calendar was correct.
6. Design a spot in the classroom with things the student loves as a “waiting” place for her to hang out between activities. This builds the skill of doing something else while waiting.

7. Do tasks associated with an event the student is waiting for. For example, if he is having trouble waiting for a snack, have him wash his hands early and put paper towels on the table. This assures him that the snack will happen (and buys you some time). This type of “tuning up” for an activity is one way of assuring a student that it will happen. It lets off some pressure and helps the student become calmer.