


Things to Do while You're Waiting: Language and Literacy





It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help reduce children's impatience when they have to wait.


You can help your child get ready to read while you're on the move!


 **Talk and listen.** Children need to use and understand speech. While you wait, ask your child, “What are you thinking?” He will be glad to know you care about what he thinks and does. Your family might also want to create a story together. One of you starts it with a sentence or a few lines. Then everyone else takes turns adding a sentence or a few lines until “The End.” Retelling a favorite story or reciting a favorite poem together can also be challenging and fun.

You might keep in mind that correcting a child's speech too often may make him want to stop talking to you! It is important to pay attention to the ideas the child is trying to express. If people around the child use language correctly, he or she will learn to do so over time.

 **Sing and rhyme.** Songs and rhymes can help waiting time go quickly, while also helping children learn sounds and language patterns. Look for poems and lyrics with plenty of repetition. Many children enjoy the Alphabet Song. You might write the alphabet on a piece of paper so your child can follow along as you sing.

 **Look for messages around you.** Help your child identify the letters, words, numerals, or symbols you see. Children like to know what their own names look like. They quickly learn to recognize company and sports team logos. A child who knows some letters, numerals, and symbols can play “I Spy.” You and she take turns finding print and symbols around you: “I spy the letter M as in m-m-macaroni. Can you find it, too?” “I spy the Chicago Bulls symbol. Can you find it, too?”

 **Write it down.** You and your child can “brainstorm” lists: books you want to read, foods you need to buy, things you see around you, or ways to solve a problem. Your child might want to make up a story while you write down her words. She can then illustrate it. Or, she can dictate a letter to a relative or friend far away.

 **Bring a book.** Tuck two or three small children's books into your purse, backpack, or diaper bag. Some parents keep a few books or magazines in the car for emergencies. (Note: Children prone to motion sickness should not look at books in a moving vehicle!) You also might want to make a habit of stopping at the library or bookstore when you run errands with your child.

For related Web resources, see “Things to Do while You're Waiting: Language and Literacy” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



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