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# 5 WONDROUS WAITING GAMES

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*a list of fun activities that transform waiting  
from bore to blessing*



# INTRODUCTION

We spend approximately 6 months of our lives waiting. Waiting in line, at traffic lights, at check-out, for our significant other to get ready, for the bus, train, for dinner to be served.

Although waiting is a fact of life, patience is an art. Staying happy and positive while having to wait can be hard. On us adults, but even harder on young children when minutes feel like eternity.

Luckily, patience works like a muscle. The more you exercise its stamina and strength, the more it becomes part of your personality.

Practice makes patient.

## A simple trick you can apply immediately

Practicing patience with young children sounds more complicated than it really is. The secret is creativity; simply fill their waiting moments with something enjoyable (or better yet, have your kids fill them for you). Transform waiting from a chore into an opportunity to have fun together. Without resorting to any electronic devices for help.

This is your list of games that do just that: 5 Wondrous Waiting Games (that secretly teach your children a little more than just patience).

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# 1. WHAT'S MISSING?

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**Best time to play:**

when waiting for dinner

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**Secret benefit:**

trains the memory, triggers lateral thinking and spatial awareness

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*After 2 years of playing this game, it's still the absolute favourite with my kids. I actually stole the idea from an episode of Daniel Tiger (hurrah for television!) and keep adapting it to my children's ability.*

- Ask your child to take a good look at all the objects lying on the table (i.e. cutlery, glasses, plates, salt and pepper shakers, the menu)
- Ask your child to close his eyes and take 1 object off the table
- Let them guess "What's missing?"

You can increase the level of difficulty by increasing the number of objects taken away. When they have trouble remembering, give them hints about its previous location or its size: "It was lying next to your fork", "it was standing behind the menu" , "it was the largest item on the table".

In doing so, you develop both their spatial awareness and their lateral thinking. It helps them to visualise and memorise objects in their relation to others, which as a result improves their capability of recall.

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## 2. WHAT ANIMAL AM I?

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**Best time to play:**  
during car journeys

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*This game is very easy to play from an early age onwards, as they grow older you can move on to people and things.*

**Secret benefit:**  
teaches the art of asking  
the right questions

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- Simply choose an animal and have your children guess what you are with  
Yes/No Questions:
  - Can you fly/swim/climb trees?
  - Do you live on the farm/on the African Savannah/in the forest?
  - Are you an insect/bird/fish?
- Once they guess the right animal, it's their turn to pick one and to be questioned

It encourages children to think and talk about an animal's habitat, type of species, size, colour etc. They also learn the art of deduction, finding out which questions get them to the answer quickest.

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## 3. I SPY

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**Best time to play:**  
when waiting in line

**Secret benefit:**  
strengthens the eye muscles  
and improves vision

*A true classic, and for good reason. Don't dismiss this one too easily, it's a fun game for even the youngest players. Start with colours and move on to more difficult words describing appearance like size and shape.*

- One player, the spy, looks around, picks an object and shouts out its appearance by saying: I spy, with my little eye, something... RED!
- All players take turns guessing the mystery item
- The person who guessed the correct object, becomes the spy

“I Spy” motivates children to observe their environment closely and to have eye for detail. It's also a great eye exercise, switching focus between nearby and far away. This strengthens the muscles in the eyes over time and improve vision overall.

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## 4. RHYMING

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**Best time to play:**  
during mealtimes

**Secret benefit:**  
improves phonemic awareness  
and oral language skills overall

*This game becomes more and more interesting with your child's increasing vocabulary. Research has shown that rhyming lays the groundwork for learning to read and write.*

- Say a word out loud and all other players need to find a rhyming word

Rhyming helps children to be playful with language, encouraging them to think about sounds and notice similar sounds in words. This gives them a sense of control and ownership of their own language, preparing them for future reading and writing. Allow your kids to throw in some of their own nonsense words to increase the fun.

We often play this game in my native language and it keeps amazing me at how extensive my son's Dutch vocabulary is without having lived there. He also effortlessly rhymes Dutch words with English ones, drawing parallels between both languages. It's beautiful to watch, I'm certain your children will surprise you too.

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# 5. PRESS MY BUTTON

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**Best time to play:**

Christmas dinners with  
extended family

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*I have no idea if there is an official version of this game, but as far as I'm concerned this game has been invented by my daughter when she was 2 years old.*

**Secret benefit:**

encourages improvisation  
and expression

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- The first player asks: Press my button!
- You push their imaginary button (on their nose, cheek, arm, you choose) and watch what this puts in motion. It can be a funny face, a crazy sound, a jerky movement or striking a pose, anything at all. The action has to be original enough to be unexpected and make the others fall of their chairs with laughter.

My youngest used to prefer to only push buttons, it's inspiring to see her development in becoming more courageous and imaginative every game. Igniting your kids's creativity and imagination is a powerful learning tool.

Point of caution: this game is so hilarious it can turn into one loud affair, so maybe not the best choice if you're waiting somewhere where silence and whispers are appreciated.

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# PRACTICE MAKES PATIENCE

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*the more you exercise it, the more it becomes  
part of your personality*

So next time you are waiting in line or at the traffic light, and your children start to become restless, introduce any of these 5 games. Turn the waiting time into an opportunity to practice their patience and to ignite their creativity.

Do your kids prefer one game above the other? Did they create an amazing new activity to pass the time? Hilarious anecdotes or total disasters, I would love to hear it all on [Facebook](#) or via [karin@unpluggedfamilytime.com](mailto:karin@unpluggedfamilytime.com).

Waiting is a fact of life. The art of exercising a positive attitude while waiting is a truly valuable skill, one we keep honing throughout life.

Better start training early.

Have fun!

Karin Louzado

Unplugged Family Time