



# The Encircling Stage

Children in the **Encircling Stage** (ages 4-8) are curious explorers—growing in independence while still looking to you for reassurance, comfort, and guidance. During these years, they are learning to love others, practice patience, and recognize the passing of time through daily rhythms and routines. As they grow, your steady presence reflects the love of God. Jesus reminds us that when we remain rooted in Him, we bear fruit. Your child experiences this truth every time he or she sees you practice faith, patience, and joyful anticipation.

*“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit...”*

**John 15:5**

## Tips for Caregivers

- Use consistent rhythms (school, meals, bedtime) to help your child understand that there is a time for everything. Building this foundation early on with simple daily rhythms helps your child understand harder concepts later, such as trusting God and waiting on His timing in relationships.
- Model patience during everyday delays—children learn waiting can be joyful by watching you display it.
- Encourage healthy anticipation by talking about events with excitement and gratitude.
- Connect waiting to faith, reminding your child that God always keeps His promises. Even if our prayers aren't answered when we want them to be, God answers in His way and in His time, which is always perfect and always worth the wait.
- Celebrate small moments of patience to affirm growth and build confidence.

## Growth Model



### Plant

Your child begins recognizing the passing of time and starts anticipating what comes next.



### Root

Your child learns to name seasons, events, and routines that help him or her understand time.



### Growth

Your child practices patience while waiting for things he or she desires, learning that waiting takes time.



### Fruit

Your child begins to plan ahead and joyfully anticipate future events with understanding, knowing the Lord brings everything about in its time and growth takes place in the waiting.

# Activity: Faithful Waiting

## STEP 1 (The Why)

Waiting is hard—for children and adults alike. When we want something, it's tempting to avoid the discomfort of waiting by distracting ourselves. But learning to live with that discomfort takes practice, and it builds strong character. We can help our children learn this kind of faithful waiting by teaching them to understand the passing of time and how much joy and growth can take place in that time.

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## STEP 2 (Activity Directions)

### 1 **Choose an Event**

- Get a special calendar that your child can write on and decorate. Then, pick a holiday or a day with a special event or activity that your child is excited about.

### 2 **Create the Countdown**

- Once you have identified the special day together, let your child decorate that day on the calendar and then show him or her the current day. Talk with your child about how much time needs to pass before the special day is here. At first, your child might be discouraged at having to wait for that time to pass, but remind him or her of how many other beautiful memories can be made in that time and how we can look for God's blessings in every day.

### 3 **Commemorate Each Day**

- At the end of each day, take a moment to thank God for what happened that day and let your child choose how he or she would like to decorate the day on the calendar to serve as a reminder. Once the current day has been celebrated, pray together for patience as you wait for the future event and joy for the present time.
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## Encouragement

This simple rhythm of faithful waiting helps cultivate patience in your child. Learning patience takes practice, and delayed gratification is an important part of that process. Let your child know you understand that waiting for something he or she wants can be hard but remind him or her that anticipation often makes good things even sweeter when they finally arrive.

Your calm presence and patient attitude during the waiting period reflect God's heart to your child.