

Perspectives in sharing

Sharing.

Some kids think it's a dirty word, but parents know better. In today's world, learning to cooperate, work together, and share are important skills for kids to learn. Not only does it help your child as they grow, it can also lead to higher levels of emotional intelligence.

"Sharing is really about teaching kids to build a community and trust others," explains Emily Cummings, Healthy Families Healthy Families & Doula Program Manager at the Child Abuse Council. But that doesn't mean that teaching the importance of sharing is easy. In many cases, it's incredibly challenging for caregivers and met with great resistance from kids. Here are a few tips.

Know your child's developmental level.

"You have to understand child development before you can teach sharing," explains Emily Cummings, Healthy Families Healthy Families & Doula Program Manager at the Child Abuse Council.

Emily explains that as children grow up, they go through different stages of development.

- At the youngest ages, kids play independently. They show little interest in what other children (or adults) are doing around them. Kids are the center of their own universe and don't have any understanding of the emotions and needs of those around the child. (This also corresponds with a lack of empathy and emotional intelligence.)
- As kids grow, they engage in "parallel play." For example, two children may be playing next to each other in a sand box, but they have very little interaction and don't actually play together.
- Around the age of two, kids begin noticing what others are doing around them. While they still aren't playing cooperatively, they may imitate what other children are doing.
- Between three and four years old, kids begin engaging in cooperative play. You know children are in this stage when you see them trying to communicate with others. For example, your child may run up to another child at the park, try to talk, or even play tag.



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Knowing your child's stage of development is key to sharing. Because if you try to explain sharing to a child who is still playing independently or parallel, it's unlikely you'll see understanding or success. Instead, try to gradually integrate lessons into your child's life.

Understand the difference between sharing and taking turns.

Many parents use sharing and taking turns interchangeably. But realistically, they are quite different. In truth, Emily says that taking turns is really a predecessor to sharing - it can help to introduce the concepts to younger kids. Sharing, on the other hand, means children actually play together.

Here's an example:

Two children want the same toy truck. Taking turns means that each child would have a chance to play with the toy independently, steering it and digging in the dirt and then passing it to the next child. Sharing it means that the two children may push the toy truck between each other - having more fun together than they could have on their own.

Set guidelines about when sharing is (and isn't) appropriate.

As a caregiver, it's your decision about how and when to integrate these concepts into your child's life.

Here are a few perspectives and tips to consider:

- Give kids responsibility: There are some possessions that are incredibly important to kids - a special bear, toy or gift. In these cases, it may be appropriate to allow your child to keep it for herself. In this case, give your child the option to put the item in a special place before friends arrive to keep it safe.
- Try redirection: Most parents have witnessed a power struggle between two children who want the same toy. Sometimes, all it takes is bringing a new toy or activity into the equation.
- Engage your child: The point of sharing is to have more fun together than by yourself. So, when children are struggling to share, ask them to brainstorm ways that playing together with something may be more fun than playing alone. (For example, "We could pretend we are different superheroes catching the bad guy." Or, "One of us could hide the item and give clues to find the toy.")

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Sharing doesn't have to be a dirty word. By understanding your child's developmental stage and helping to integrate cooperative strategies, kids can see the benefits of sharing - playing with others, building verbal and emotional skills, and making friends. And this will help kids today and down the road.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog 3/31/16. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention
2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse
3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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