

Sharing and learning to share

Learning to share can be a challenge for young children, but sharing is a skill they need for play and learning throughout childhood.

Why sharing is important

Sharing is a vital life skill. It's something toddlers and children need to learn to make and keep friends and play cooperatively.

Once your child starts having playdates and going to child care, preschool or kindergarten, he'll need to be able to share with others.



Helping your child learn about sharing

Children often take their cues from what they see their parents doing.

When you model good sharing and turn-taking in family life, you give your children a great example to follow.

Children also need opportunities to learn about and practise sharing. Here are some ways to encourage sharing in everyday life:

- **Point out good sharing in others.** You can say things like, 'Your friend was sharing her toys really well. That was very kind of her'. You can also point out sharing examples in any books, DVDs or TV shows your child enjoys. For example, you could say things such as, 'Look at Karen and Rhys sharing the playdough on Playschool. They're having so much fun!'
- When you see your child trying to share or take turns, make sure you give lots of [praise](#) and attention. For example, 'I liked the way you let Aziz play with your train. Great sharing!'
- Play games with your child that involve sharing and turn-taking. Talk your child through the steps, saying things like, 'Now it's my turn to build the tower, then it's your turn. You share the red blocks with me, and I'll share the green blocks with you'.
- Talk to your child about sharing before she goes on playdates with other children. For example, you could say, 'When Georgia comes over, you'll need to share some of your toys. Why don't we ask her what she wants to play with?' You can also talk to your child about sharing before heading off to child care or preschool.
- Put away any special toys when other children are coming to play at your house. This might help avoid problems with sharing altogether.



Sharing teaches children about compromise. They learn that if we give a little to others, we can get some of what we want as well. Children who share also learn how to take turns and negotiate, and how to cope with disappointment.

When your child won't share

Most children find sharing a challenge, especially at first. They often need practice and support to develop this skill.

If your child doesn't share well, you can try practising together at home and talking about what you're doing. For example: 'Let's share this banana. You can have some, and I can have some'.

Another strategy is to stay nearby when your child plays with others, encouraging him so he doesn't forget to share.

There's no reason to avoid playdates if your child has trouble sharing. Instead, use them as a chance to help her practise. When she does try to share, say exactly what she did well and how proud you are.

Consequences for not sharing

It can help to create [consequences](#) when children don't share. For instance, if siblings are fighting over a toy and not sharing, a reasonable consequence might be to take away the toy for a short period of time.

When you use consequences for not sharing, it's important that the consequences relate to what is being shared – or not shared! When the consequence – taking the toy away – is related to the behaviour, it gets your children to think about the issue and feels fairer as well.

After a little while, you can give children another chance to show they can share the toy.

Sharing at different ages

Toddlers

Your toddler probably doesn't have an understanding of what sharing is. In general, toddlers believe they're the centre of the world and that everything belongs to them.

By age three, many children will start to understand the concept of turn-taking. But they might still throw a [tantrum](#) if another child takes a toy that they want.

When another child has something your toddler really wants, your child will probably find it very hard to wait his turn. He might even try to get the toy any way he can.

Preschoolers

By preschool age, most children have a basic idea about sharing. But your preschooler still might not be keen to put sharing into action, and can be impatient when waiting her turn.

You can build your preschooler's sharing skills by watching for good turn-taking and encouraging fairness. If there's trouble, it can help to remind your preschooler how bad he would feel if someone took his toy, or didn't let him have a turn. Talking to him about other people's feelings will help him understand life from someone else's perspective, which is a great skill to have.

It's important to be realistic about a preschooler's ability to share. At this age, most children are still very self-focused, and have little understanding of other people's thoughts and emotions.

School-age children

By the time most children start school, they're beginning to understand that other people have feelings separate from their own. They can understand the idea of sharing and taking turns.

But most children still need you to remind and support them, particularly if they're being asked to share a much-loved toy or game.

At this age, your child will be much more patient and tolerant than she used to be. She'll also be keen to do the right thing. She can form more complex relationships, which really helps with the idea of sharing. She'll get lots of sharing practice at school too.



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