

We want our children to share and cooperate with others. However, toddlers and preschoolers are just learning how to share, so we parents need to teach them. Telling our children to share or cooperate is like telling them to multiply or divide. They do not know how. Showing them how and why we share promotes cooperation and prevent arguments.

Show them how

Instead of telling children to take turns, show them how to take turns. If a girl and boy are fighting over a toy, for example, explain that Ashley will play with it for a short while, and then it will be Zachary's turn. Help him find another toy to play with until his turn. After a short while, maybe five minutes, remind Ashley that it is Zachary's turn with the toy and help her find another toy. Praise her for giving him a turn, and praise him for waiting patiently. As they continue taking turns, watch the clock for them if necessary.

Instead of taking turns, show them how to play with a toy together, such as rolling a ball or pushing a truck back and forth. Games such as these foster cooperation in children.

Teach them why

Adults share because we care about the other person's feelings and because it makes us feel good to make others happy. Give your children opportunities at playgroup to help other children so they will learn that it feels good to help others. For example, they can pass out snacks or get a toy for a baby.

Children learn to recognize other people's feelings when you specifically point out the consequences of their actions. Tell them, "Brendon is crying because you took his toy away. How do you think he feels? How did you feel when someone took your toy away from you?"

Praise good behavior and be specific, too. Don't say, "How nice of you." Instead, say, "You shared because you're the kind of person who helps others. You're a good friend. Look how happy Brendon is because you shared your toy."

Read and discuss stories about sharing. You can use *Mine! A Sesame Street Book about Sharing* by Linda Hayward and *I Am Sharing* by Mercer Mayer, or you can discuss the topic as it comes up in other stories, such as the seven dwarves sharing their home with Snow White.

Finally, teach by example. Let your children see you sharing, cooperating and being considerate of others, and they will imitate you.

Prevent conflicts

Perhaps the best prevention is eliminating the source of conflict. When hosting a playdate, try to have two or three of the same toy so sharing will not be an issue. Have several dolls or cars. You could ask parents to bring riding toys, for example, if you do not have enough for every child. Alternatively, provide bubbles and blocks for cooperative play.

Because toddlers find it difficult to share from a common pile, divide toys into separate piles. If you make it clear that one pile belongs to this child, and another pile belongs to that child, you may be able to avoid arguments.

Putting away favorite toys before playmates arrive will not only prevent arguments, but also keep toys from accidentally getting broken. Also, if your child wants to take a special toy to playgroup, remind him that he will have to share with others. Encourage him to leave it at home or in the car.

Also, reassure your toddler that, even though his friends will play with his toys, they will not take his toys home with them.

These preventive and proactive measures should help you promote sharing and prevent conflicts. Despite your best intentions, however, issues with sharing will likely crop up. Do your best to diffuse the situations and turn them into learning experiences for your own child and the others in playgroup.



About the Author:

Carren W. Joye is the author of [A Stay-at-Home Mom's Complete Guide to Playgroups](#) . A homeschooling mom of four children, she has founded four successful playgroups and one homeschool support group as well as helped start countless other playgroups around the world via the Internet.