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parent to parent help

Learning to Share

Moving from "Mine!" to Taking Turns

Sharing doesn't come easily to young children. They are busy building their sense of who they are and they tend to see their possessions as extensions of themselves. They may think that if someone takes something from them they will never get it back, or it will be changed in some way.

Empathy and a true understanding of other people's feelings begin to emerge only in the late preschool years. Forcing a child to share before she is ready won't work, but there are some things you can do to lay the groundwork for later success ... and to help ease those inevitable conflicts while your child is still learning.

Realize that selfishness is normal and necessary

- Young children generally want what they want, when they want it. Explain to your child that these feelings of wanting are okay to have, even if they aren't always satisfied. Try to help her understand that other people have the same feelings, and that many children may want the same things as she does.

- Respect your child's need not to share certain special possessions. Help her decide which things she will protect as hers only and which things she will share with others.
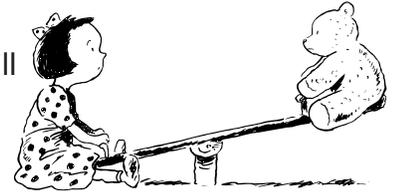
Provide alternatives that are acceptable to your child

- Provide two of something whenever possible.

- Encourage taking turns, since this is an easier concept to grasp than sharing. Point out to your child that there may not be enough of a certain toy for everyone to have one at the same time.

- Suggest that children trade toys with one another.

Model conflict resolution

- Validate your child's feelings of sadness, anger, or frustration if a conflict occurs. Help her give words to her emotions and explain those of other children. Teach her how to ask other children to share.

- For very young children, provide concrete solutions to problems and help them follow through. For example, "Nathan can play with this toy for five minutes (or until lunch) and then you will have a turn for five minutes (or after lunch)."

- Help preschool-aged and older children think up solutions on their own: "What can we do to make all the kids happy?"

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