

LEARNING TO SHARE

"Learning to share is one of the hardest jobs of life."

~ T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.,
Touchpoints

Sharing with others is an important ability for children to learn. This ability is learned through modeling and through maturity as children begin to have relationships with other children.

At 18 months to two years of age, children generally "ignore" other children. Their play is often parallel. They will play for long periods of time side-by-side. They may not look at each other. They may never interact with each other. Yet they seem to copy play behaviors.

At around two-and-a-half years of age, children begin to pay a lot of attention to others, but much of their attention is spent in protecting the things they want to play with FROM the other children, and in grabbing what the other children have.

At this age most children do not have the capacity to fully understand the concept of sharing. They are working hard on independence and sorting out what that means in their lives. They will generally have little regard for the feelings or safety of their playmates.

We cannot expect children to share at this age. We should not force them to share or make them feel ashamed for not sharing.

By the ages of three or four, children are feeling more secure about their independence. They are now very excited about other children. They are ready to understand turn taking, which is the basis of sharing. They want to cooperatively play WITH other children. It is in these play relationships that children practice and "try-out" various behaviors.



Photo by Howard G. Buffett

WHAT CAN I DO TO ENCOURAGE MY CHILD TO SHARE?

Provide play opportunities with other children.

During playtime with others, provide toys and materials that more than one child can use at a time. (Blocks, crayons, play-dough, dress-up clothes, etc.)

Encourage trade or exchange situations. (John will pull you in the wagon and then you can pull him.)

Model sharing in the home.

Recognize when your child responds to another child's feelings. (Shows empathy) These caring feelings will promote sharing.

TODDLER PROPERTY LAWS

If I like it, it's mine.

If it's in my hand, it's mine.

If I can take it from you, it's mine.

If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.

If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.

If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.

If it looks just like mine, it is mine.

If I saw it first, it's mine.

If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.

If it's broken, it's yours!