



Positive Parenting of Toddlers

Sharing

Learning to share is an important part of growing up. Toddlers are just beginning to learn about ownership and can be possessive about their things. They may snatch, push another child away or refuse to share a favourite toy. Parents with two or more children may face sharing problems every day. Problems can also occur over sharing when other children visit your home or your toddler mixes with other children on outings. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your toddler to share.



Toddlers cannot see things from another person's point of view, so reasoning with your toddler is not the best way to teach sharing. Toddlers may love having other children around, but tend to play beside rather than with them. They often do not share at first, it takes time and effort to teach children how to share and play together. Typically, by four to five years of age children have learnt to share and understand turntaking.

How To Help Prevent Problems with Sharing

Set Your Children Up in Separate Activities if You Cannot Watch Them

When you are busy you cannot provide uninterrupted supervision for your children. Set your children up in separate activities and make sure there is some space between them. Regularly interrupt your own tasks and praise your children for playing nicely.

Be Fair

Treat each child equally to avoid rivalry between them. Do not allow your younger child to get away with snatching because they are little and may not understand. Your older child may feel frustrated if they have to give in to a younger sibling all the time. Treat each child the same—it takes more than one to fight.

Prepare Your Child for Visiting

When you know other children will be visiting or you are going on an outing, explain to your child that you would like them to share some of their toys. Help your child choose some toys they are willing to share with other children. Set out the toys and tell other children they are welcome to play with them.

Treat Visitors the Same as Your Own Children

Explain your routine to visiting children and their parents before you use it. In your home ask visitors to follow your rules. If other children play roughly or don't take care of your child's toys, tell them how the toy should be used. If the rough play continues, ask your child if they would like you to put the toy away. If so, remove it for five minutes, then return it and tell the other children to play gently.

Insist on Fair Play

Problems can arise when older or bigger children take over and do not let your toddler have a turn. Be prepared to step in and ensure that all children share. Your child cannot be expected to share if others won't share. Don't wait for other parents to come to your child's rescue. Be prepared to insist on fair play.

How To Teach Your Child To Share

Set a Good Example

Teach your child by showing them how you share, such as offering them some of a snack you are eating or letting them have a turn in something you are doing.

Select Activities Which Encourage Sharing

When you have time to spend with your children, set them up in an activity, such as using playdough on a table together, playing with cars on a car mat, or building with blocks. Watch closely and praise sharing and cooperation. Start with two to five minute activities and gradually make them longer.

Praise Your Child for Sharing

Praise your child from time to time for waiting their turn, sharing and letting others play with their things—*You girls are playing really well together. Jill, that's lovely sharing, letting Jean play with your blocks too.*

Catch Your Child if They Are About To Snatch

Act quickly if you see that snatching is about to happen. Grasp your child's hand and remind them to say *Please* and to wait their turn. Praise your child for asking nicely and waiting.

How To Manage Sharing Problems

Tell Your Child What To Do

If your child snatches or pushes another child away from the toys, tell them what they have done wrong—*Mark, you must not snatch when Emma is playing with it—and what you want them to do instead—Give it back and let her finish her turn.*

Give the Toy to the Other Child

If your child refuses to do as you have asked, take the toy from them and give it to the other child.

Use Quiet Time

If your child snatches again, or protests, put them in quiet time. Quiet time involves removing your attention from your child and having them sit quietly on the edge of the activity for a short time. Sit your child on a chair. When your child has been quiet for two minutes return them to the activity. Watch for sharing and cooperating and praise your children as soon as possible after quiet time.

How To Manage Sharing Problems When You Did Not See What Happened

There will be times when children fight over a toy and you cannot tell who had the toy first or how the problem started. Try to avoid simply giving in to the younger child when they protest or they may learn that protesting loudly gets them what they want. A younger child may even provoke an older child to get a reaction. Avoid asking the older child what happened or what

they did to cause the youngster to scream. A two to four-year-old cannot tell you exactly what happened.

The following suggestions may be helpful when you find children fighting over a toy:

- Help the children decide who can play with the toy first instead of fighting over it—*Adam and Andrew, stop fighting. You need to share the toy. Who is going to have the first turn?* Let each child go first at different times—no favourites.
- If a solution is reached, praise the children for sharing and taking turns.
- If a solution is not reached, remove the toy. After five minutes, return it and help the children decide who will play first. Praise sharing.
- If the children protest or refuse to share, put both of them into quiet time. Return the children to the activity and remind them to share and take turns.

Key Steps

- Set your children up with separate activities when you are busy.
- Select activities that promote sharing, cooperation, and turn-taking when you can watch your children.
- Before visits with other children help your child choose toys for sharing.
- Watch closely and act if problems are about to occur.
- Praise sharing and cooperation.
- If problems arise, help your children decide who can play first.
- Remove the toy or activity if children do not share and try again after five minutes.
- Use quiet time if your child protests or refuses to share.
- Treat all children equally.

See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.



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