Sharing

Conflicts over sharing objects are an issue that child care practitioners face every day. Here are a few common conflicts.

1. A child collects a bunch of toys and other materials. The child may simply hold these things and may not be able to play with them.

2. A child grabs or takes things that other people are using.

3. A child walks away from a toy he was playing with, and when another child picks it up, the first child wants to use the toy again.

4. A child is unwilling to take turns.

Why do children have trouble sharing?

Most adults want children to share, but they forget how hard this can be. Caregivers can think about how hard it would be to have someone take away the telephone while they are making a telephone call, or to give their purse to a stranger. This is how a child feels who is playing with a fire truck and then is asked to share it. While sharing is an important skill to adults, they need to remember that for children, sharing is not always easy.

Young children often see the toys they play with as a part of themselves. When they are forced to share, they feel like they are in danger. It is as if they are being asked to give away a part of their body. As children grow from toddlers into preschoolers, their understanding of their bodies increases and they become better able to share. Because toddlers still see the toys as part of themselves, they are not ready to share.

Between the ages of three and five years, children gain a stronger sense of themselves. They are now more able and willing to share. Because this is a change that happens as a child matures, rather than a learned skill, it is not helpful to ask children to “practice” sharing.

In addition, young children are egocentric. This means that they believe the world centers on them. They do not think about another person’s feelings and needs. While young children can do nice things for others, most often they have trouble thinking about how someone else feels. As children grow, they develop the ability to think about how other people feel.