What can I do to teach my child to share?

Most adults want their children to share. But we forget how hard this can be. Think about what it would be like to have someone take the telephone out of your hand while you are making a telephone call or what it would feel like to give your purse to someone you don’t know. Now, put yourself in the place of the child who is playing with a fire truck and then is asked to share it. While sharing is important to us, we need to remember that 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 are able to think about how other people feel.

Teach turn taking

Allow a child to play until he is finished. Then make sure that the waiting child gets a turn. This way, each child learns how to finish using things and how to wait for a turn.

Help both children as they learn to take turns. If a child can’t find a way to finish, talk about it with him. Ask him, “How are you going to finish playing with that toy?”

Stay near a child who is waiting to play with a toy. You could help him to play with another toy. Ask him, “Would you like to use the car while you are waiting for the truck?” If the waiting child is upset, try a calming activity. “Would you like me to read you a book while you are waiting for your turn?”

Teach problem solving

When a sharing problem comes up, it’s a good time to teach your child some ways to solve her own problems.

- Start by saying what you see is happening: “You both want the same toy.”
- Ask the children for ideas. “What can you do?” Often children will surprise you by coming up with some good ideas that you might not have thought about.
- If both children agree to the idea, then you have a solution. If not, you can always offer a chance to take turns instead.
What can I do if my child bites?

Biting is a common behavior for children between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four months and for some young preschool children. Usually, as children’s language improves, the biting problem tends to stop. If your child is biting in child care, you will want to use the same ways of solving the biting problem as those being used in child care. Children learn much faster when they are treated the same way at home as in child care.

Talk about biting

The first thing to say is, “Biting hurts.” Often children don’t know that biting is painful and this is the place to begin. Use a firm tone of voice to say that this is serious and important.

What should I say to the child who was bitten?

“I think that hurts. Let’s go wash it and put some ice on it.” Comfort this child tenderly. Being bitten is a very upsetting experience, and most children need comforting from an adult to feel that they will be safe in your care.

Respond to biting

1. Involve the child who did the biting in getting the ice for the child who was bitten. Take the child and wash the bite. Then say, “Let’s all go get some ice.” Let the child who did the biting help to get the ice. This gives the child a chance to make things better. The child who was bitten may not want to be touched by the child who bites. Make sure you respect those wishes.
2. Teach the child who bites new skills. Give the child some simple words like “stop” or “no” so that she can use words to feel safe.
3. Help both children get into a calming activity to help them relax. You may want to try reading a book with the child, or playing with play dough, sand, or water.

Working with a child who bites — at home

1. Look at the time when the child bit someone. Maybe your child was hungry. Try a crunchy or chewy snack just before this time of day.
2. Was your child tired? Try a quiet time for book reading, calming bath, or rest time to prevent biting from happening again.
3. Also, remember teething pain can cause biting. Offer safe teething toys that are large enough so a child can’t choke on them.
4. Your child may need more time with you. Try spending more time with your child or doing a special activity together.
5. Help your child by allowing her to have a few special toys that she does not need to share.
6. Learning to talk can be hard work. Give your child words to tell others that he wants to use something: “May I have a turn?” and “I’m still using it” are good words to teach your child to use.