Sharing Summary

Why Sharing?

Whether it's your five-year-old melting down because their friend won't share their Lego set, your seven-year-old coveting the family iPad while their sibling waits not so patiently, or your ten-year-old obsessing over the presents they want for their birthday, our children's relationships with "stuff" can become a daily challenge if we don't create plans and strategies for dealing with them along with getting input from our children.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Engage your child in a conversation about sharing and turn taking. You might start by asking: *"How can you take turns with your playthings?"*
- Paraphrasing what you heard your child say. A conversation might go something like this:
    - Child: *"I shared my art supplies with Amanda and she messed them all up.*" Paraphrase: *"So I hear you did share your art supplies with Amanda, but you didn't like what she did with them."* If you hear a subtext of feeling, as in this example, you can also reflect back the feeling implied. Reflect the feeling: *"I get the sense you were upset and disappointed that Amanda made a mess of your materials. Is that right?"*
- Engage your child in a conversation about friendship. You could ask:
    - *"How can you start new friendships?"*
    - *"What does a good friend look like?"*
    - *"What do you think it means to be a good friend?*"
    - "*What would you like others to do to reach out to you?"* (Do they want to be included in games or fun activities?) Then ask your child, "*How can you adopt those qualities and actions? How can you be the one to include others?"*
    - And, when disputes over stuff are involved, *"How can you act as a good friend without giving away things that might have significant value and importance to you?"*

Tip Sometimes, feeling the need for friends especially when they feel like they don't have many can make a child feel alone, vulnerable, and different. Yet, "stuff" can get in the way and create arguments. Reassure your child that it's normal to disagree with friends over things, but that people will always be more important than possessions.

Trap Our worries are not always our children's worries. Listen closely to what is most concerning to your child without projecting your own thoughts, concerns, and feelings.

Trap Be sure you talk about stressful friendship challenges at a calm time when you are not stressed!

Tip Grab a large newsprint sheet of paper or poster board. Ask your child, "What's your favorite hero, book character, or movie character?" Have them draw the hero on the poster board. Now list the many characteristics that hero might possess in being a good friend - "*Are they kind? Do they help others? Do they accept others for who they are? What stuff is important for them to have, and what stuff is important for them to share?*"

Tip For nine-year-olds and ten-year olds, friendships may be a sensitive topic. Remove the spotlight from your child by discussing the meaning of friendship as a whole family at a family dinner. Include all family members' perspectives. Talk about what you value in a friend. Discuss how you try and act as a good friend. Talk about how you go about making new friends. Talk about where possessions fall into that mix.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model turn taking.
- Organize together. In order for your children to respect their possessions as well as the items that make up your household, they need to be involved in the care, organization, and keeping of those things.
- Establish some rules for your own organization.
- Set up play spaces for success.
- Establish a consistent clean-up routine.
- Teach your child to collaborate using collaborative games.
- As your children cultivate friendships, play, and take turns with toys, they'll surely run into conflicts. Offer practice with some problem-solving tools so that when arguments occur, you don't have to play referee. Here are some problem-solving tools to try:
    - Teach collaborative problem solving with the traffic light model.
    - Teach and practice "I-messages" like: *"I feel _____(insert feeling word) when you _____ (name the words or actions that upset you) because_____."*
    - Follow up when your child makes mistakes to help them repair harm.

Tip Proactively teach turn taking by initiating some family games in which your child will have the chance to participate in turn taking.

Tip Because children need to learn and practice how to own a plaything, care for it, and then, collaborate with others with it, children need to individually own that thing. In other words, in households where there are numerous siblings, much can be shared. But, ensure that each child owns one plaything that is theirs alone. More is not better and sometimes, more playthings - if there are too many - makes it difficult to learn skills because of the clutter. Offering moderation in their ownership of playthings gives them the opportunity to practice valuable skills.

Trap Developmentally, our children have to understand ownership before they understand and can actively share. Young children can take turns, but sharing when it's enforced by adults does not work. In directing a child to share or even taking away a toy in the moment of play and giving it to another, it sends the message that the child with the toy has no rights, is not trusted, and has no real ownership. That child might feel punished but not sure why. This can break down trust between parent and child. This tool will offer constructive alternatives.

Tip It's likely that your kids will engage in some competitive sports activities either by playing informally in your neighborhood or by playing on a team. And those experiences can also offer valued skills like teamwork, learning how to win and lose graciously, and getting along with others.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Use *"*Show me*…"* statements: *"Show me how you can take turns with your sister while playing."* Set a goal for a playtime, and then reflect afterward on how it went.
- Practice turn taking!
- Practice brainstorming to help your child learn how to create many solutions to a problem.
- Notice even small successes: "*I noticed how you used an I-message with your sister when you got frustrated. That's excellent!"*
- Schedule playdates.
- Discuss a few simple rules with your child in advance of a playdate.
- Proactively remind. You may whisper in your child's ear, *"Remember how we take turns. How can you do that with your friend?"*

Tip When it comes to figuring out who to invite over and when, follow your child's lead. Who does your child talk about at home? That's a perfect place to begin.

Tip Our children have plenty of time for screen time. Playdates should not be one of them if you want to maximize your child's social learning. Adopt the motto: "*Friends before screens.*" Perhaps get out some novelty toys that haven't been opened yet or some creative playthings to attract their attention and interest, put away the screens, and allow them time to work out what they'll do.

Tip The best way to turnaround a misbehavior that may be taking place is by recognizing when and how your child makes good choices and acts positively in similar circumstances. Children need to learn what to do as well as what not to do.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's Development and Success

- Ask key questions like: "*Did you have fun during your playdate? What made it fun?"*
- Learn about development.
- Reflect on outcomes to build confidence: *"Remember when you and Sam were not getting along? Sam wanted to control the iPad and you did too. But, now you both have discovered that playing dress up with costumes and making up stories together without screens is more fun, and you've remained good friends."*
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for trying out new and different collaborative friendship-building strategies can help offer additional support and motivation for your child when tough issues arise.
- Engage in further practice.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *"I notice you took turns with your Rubix Cube when your brother wanted to play with it too. I'll bet that felt good. Excellent."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Encourage opportunities for fun and further connection.

Trap Avoid stickers, gifts, or other physical rewards for performance. These actually have a de-motivating effect on children. When you remove the candy, for example, have they internalized the skills and also the sense of responsibility for performing them? There's less of a chance if you've offered a "bribe." Focus on your attention as the best reward. This is an essential strategy in discipline for skill building.

Tip Be specific. "Good job" seems to not carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - "*You went and found a common interest with the new girl you met. Love seeing that*!" - can promote more of the same.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child's success today and in their future!

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