



Sharing Summary

Why Sharing?

When your three-year-old is unwilling to share their toy with their neighborhood friend, or your four-year-old cries when someone won't share with them, it upsets their relationships. Your child's emerging abilities to engage with their peers and become part of a social community are essential to their development.

Tip These steps are best done when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parent relationship will support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *"What do you notice? How do you feel? How do you think the other child feels? What are you wondering?"*
 - For example, if your child is with others who are being asked to share - such as sitting on the sidewalk with neighbors and drawing with colored chalk - help your child notice their own thoughts and reactions and those of the other children. You might even name what expressions and body language you notice. For example, *"I noticed you are holding the purple and the green chalk even though you are only using the purple one. The green one is tucked under your leg. Are you worried that someone will take it before you get a chance to use it?"* You can also point out how your child seems to feel before and after sharing with a friend. *"You were holding your doll tightly this morning and did not want anyone else to hold it. Now, I see your friend is holding the doll, and you are smiling. I think you feel good to see that your friend is happy."*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe all the emotions that occur when learning to share and take turns, consider asking questions, naming what you notice, and leaving plenty of quiet space after your questions so they have an opportunity to share their ideas too.
 - *"How did you feel when you were keeping the green chalk to yourself?"*
 - *"I noticed some children did not get to use the colors they wanted to use."*
 - *"I noticed other children offered to share their chalk with each other."*
 - *"Was there anything that made you feel worried?"*

- *“How do you feel right now?”*
- *“How do you think you will feel next time we share the chalk?”*
- *“Is there anything we can do to remember how good it felt to share with your friends?”*
- When reading books, look at the images of people and ask your child what they notice when the characters share with one another. Ask, *“How do you think that character is feeling? Has sharing ever made you feel that way?”*

Tip Your child will give you lots of cues about whether a request to share feels challenging for them at that moment. Every child is different, and your own child may change from day-to-day in how willing they are to take on challenges and to be resilient when those experiences become difficult.

Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Help your child to offer an extra book, snack, or doll to a friend. *“Let’s go over and see if your friend would like a snack too.”* Then, over time, you can help them shift to turn-taking using short turns and visible cues that remind them to keep waiting. *“Pick one truck that you would like to let your friend play with for a little while and then you can take turns.”*
- When you ask your child to share a toy or something else, they will worry that they will not get it back later or there will not be enough for them to get what they need. Following through on what you say can ease their fears and encourage sharing. *“You will get another turn with the ball soon”* or *“You will get some blocks too”*.
- Read and “pretend play” together.
 - Point out how characters are sharing in the books you read together.
 - Role-play sharing to help your child practice the steps and emotions that go with giving someone else something that they have. For example, have a pretend tea party together, and when your child offers you some tea or moves some lemon wedges from their plate onto yours, they are experiencing making something that was “mine” become “yours.” Take turns pouring the tea from the teapot to allow your child an opportunity to practice waiting.
- Share your thoughts and feelings: *“This is my favorite puzzle, and I was worried that if I let her use it, she might lose some of the pieces.”*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *“It made me feel so much better to tell you that I was worried about the puzzle pieces. I am going to tell her how many pieces there are so she can know how many she should have when she returns it.”*
- Grow empathy. For example, when your child uses definitive language like, “It’s mine,” you may respond with:
 - *“Sometimes it can feel really hard to share but then it feels good that someone else got to enjoy the toy too.”*
 - *“Do you remember last time when sharing seemed hard? You took a deep breath and were able to do it.”*
 - *“I wonder if we can do something that will make it easier to share.”*

- Help your child notice and name their own cues so they can develop self-awareness and learn to trust their own feelings. This includes describing and naming the pride they may feel when they have gotten through a challenging situation. Pointing out the resilience that they demonstrate will help them notice it and know it is there when the next challenge arises.

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

- Consider the request to share and make sure that the request to share is reasonable. What is being asked to be shared? Is it something new? Something special? Something that will be used up (e.g. art supplies) and unlikely to be replaced? Sharing is easiest when the item to share feels less valuable to your child and is not consumable. Start sharing with those objects and then work up to sharing more challenging items.
- Think about who your child is being asked to share with. How hard is it for your child to trust the other person to take good care of their toys? If it is someone your child knows and trusts, this should feel like an easier sharing experience. If it is someone they do not know, consider that this may be more challenging for your child.
- Provide opportunities for your child to take on sharing in ways that are more challenging than what they have done before. If they have already mastered taking 2-minute turns with a timer, try taking longer turns or not using a visual cue such as a timer.
- Provide books, dolls, and other materials at home that give your child a chance to practice sharing through role-playing. Can they give their doll a turn to wear their favorite hat? Can they point out sharing that happens in a picture book?
- Use your child's dolls or stuffed animals to act out moments of sharing that are challenging. *"What should the doll do if he does not want to share?" "I wonder if the doll could take a breath and ask for help?"*
- Initially, practice may require more teaching but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.

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

- Use "Show me..." statements like *"Show me that you can share your toy with your friend."*
- Don't move on quickly if your child shows interest in trying something new. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they are competent. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain skills over time.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed that you were uncertain about sharing your new tricycle, but you got through it and had a good time afterall. I love seeing that."*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your child is reluctant to share, offer confidence in your child's ability to speak up for the way they feel: *"I do not want to share my doll right now."*

- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when asked to share. You can offer reflections like:
 - *“You seem worried about sharing the ball with your friend.”* Offering comfort when facing hard situations can help your child gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away.
 - You can also offer comfort items to help your child face new challenges. *“Would you like to hold your bear while your friend is borrowing the doll?”*

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

- Recognize and call out when sharing is going well. If your child was unwilling or reluctant to share last time you were with this friend but seems more relaxed today, notice the change. *“I notice you were more willing today to let James use the toy trucks. He really enjoyed playing with them. That was very kind of you to share with him!”*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Notice when your child offers something to a friend or waits for their turn.

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