



Sharing Summary

Why Sharing?

Whether it's your five-year-old breaking down because their friend won't share their Lego set or your ten-year-old obsessing over the presents they want for their birthday, your child's relationship with "stuff" can become a daily challenge. Your child's emerging ability to engage with their peers and become part of a social community is essential to their development.

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

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

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?"*
- Paraphrase 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 shared 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?"*
- Grab a large newsprint sheet of paper or poster board. Ask your child, *"Who's your favorite hero, book character, or movie character?"* Have them draw the hero on the poster board. Now, list the many characteristics that a 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?"*

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 Your worries are not always your child'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 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.
- Turn taking does require teaching and practicing. So at a family dinner, call it out when you are taking turns with the butter, ketchup, or salt. Point to yourself and say, "My turn to use the ketchup." Point to another and say, "It's your turn."
- Proactively teach turn taking by initiating some family games in which your child will have the chance to participate in turn taking.
- 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.
- Developmentally, your child has to understand ownership before they understand and can actively share.
- Organize together. In order for your child 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 child cultivates friendships, plays, and takes 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 _____."

- Gather a few stuffed friends or action figures around to teach this skill.
- Follow up when your child makes mistakes to help them repair harm.
- 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.*”
- Help your child notice and name their own cues, so they can develop self-awareness and learn to trust their own feelings.

Tip Working together as a family can be enjoyable. Turn on some music or sing a song while cleaning up.

Trap Don’t nag. Instead set a timer to remind your children when it’s time for cleaning up.

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. 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 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.
- 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 The best way to turn around a misbehavior 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.

Tip Children have plenty of time for screens. 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.

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

- Ask key questions like: “*Did you have fun during your playdate? What made it fun?*”
- Recognize effort by saying “I notice....” like, “*I noticed how you used an I-message with your sister when you got frustrated. That’s excellent!*”
- 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.

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

- Notice even small successes. “*I noticed 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.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Sharing Summary. Ages 5-10*. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.