

Sharing & Prosocial Behavior

Sharing and cooperating with peers can be challenging for children. Children are not born with these skills, and those who struggle with prosocial skills may lack the level of social and emotional development needed to independently and willingly share and take turns with friends. We need to specifically teach children how to share, cooperate and engage with peers in a prosocial fashion, and we need to create many different opportunities for them to practice these skills on a regular basis. By supporting positive peer interactions, we can help children to develop emotional skills that will lead to stronger friendships and feelings of self-worth and confidence, which in turn leads to decreased negative behaviors.

- **Don't force a child to share.** Encourage patience and respectful communication such as requesting a turn. If the child is not ready to share yet, model "I'm not done yet, but you can have it when I'm finished". Suggest things the child can do while they wait or give them a special job.
- **Model sharing and positive interactions** – Join in play and offer your items to others; invite others into your play. Point out when you see other people are sharing. Give compliments. Monkey see, monkey do!
- **Directly teach the desired social skill** (explain the skill, demonstrate the skill, let the child practice the skill, provide feedback).
- **Planned Activities** – Create activities and experiences that involve sharing and cooperation. Playing catch, a group art project with shared materials, passing out snacks to friends, board games or organized peer play.
- **Monitor the child during play** – Give children time and space to work out issues; don't rush to jump in. Stay close and if the situation does deteriorate then intervene. Provide suggestions or use questions to help children come to their own resolutions.
- **Use cooperative toys in the classroom** - Use toys that encourage or require at least two children (puppets, dress-up, teeter totters, two phones, etc.)
- **Peer partners** – pairing a child who has good social skills with a child who is lacking these skills.
- **Suggest play ideas** – when adults provide ideas and prompts to expand play, they can increase the duration of cooperative play among peers.
- **Time sharing** – Use a timer and let the children know before play begins that they will have to share the toy after a specific amount of time. If that toy causes too many problems, then time-out the toy and explain that that it is off limits because they are unable to share it.

