

{4-5 YEARS}

Sharing is Caring

Teaching your children how to share

BY CHRISTY PIÑA

Sharing is one of the most crucial lessons children learn early in their lives. While certain lessons can be taught as children continue to grow up, sharing is something that should be taught sooner than later.

Sharing does not come naturally for young children, Tracie Frial, LMHC, said. They tend to resist sharing because developmentally, they are very “me-centered” in their early years. Frial said that toys have much more value to children than parents perceive them to have because to children, their toys are more than just material items. This is why children are often emotional at the thought of sharing. “Parents can validate their child’s feelings, but also talk with them about how happy their friend is to also play with the toy they have shared and that they both can be happy together playing with the toy,” she said.

While it may be a difficult task to undertake, there are a few ways to make teaching your child to share a bit easier.

ENCOURAGE BACK AND FORTH SHARING

Kristina Chance, owner of Play and Wellness Center of Gainesville, encourages parents to ensure their child knows that sharing something does not mean giving it up completely, but rather trading for a bit, whether that means trading one toy for another or just taking turns with one toy.

If you are having difficulty reminding your child to take turns with a toy, consider using a timer to encourage that back and forth trading. If at a playdate there is one particular toy that both children want to play with, set the timer for about 5 minutes. Let your child play with the toy until the timer goes off, and then have her switch with her friend. Repeat so that she understands that she will eventually get her toy back.

MODEL GOOD SHARING BEHAVIORS

Praise and reinforcement can go a long way when it comes to teaching children things they may not want to learn. And modeling behaviors for your children to mimic is often very effective. “Simply put, kids do what they see,” Meghan Hamlet, owner of New Paths Counseling, said. “The best way for parents to instill good sharing habits in their children is to demonstrate that behavior at home. By showing a child what it means to share and giving them positive feedback and reinforcement, kids can learn this skill.” For instance you, may practice taking turns with different toys while you play with your children, or share snacks with them and other family members to show how you share.

DO NOT PUSH YOUR CHILD TO SHARE ALL THE TIME

Leah Galione, a local mom of five, thinks children are more likely to share if they feel like they have autonomy over some of their own toys. “I think it’s important also, in large families, that they also have things that belong just to them. So, they can feel like, ‘I don’t have to share every single one of my toys. I don’t have to share,’” she said. “It’s OK to have things that are just theirs.”

Expecting your child to always share, particularly at a young age, can be difficult. Chance reminds parents that young children are very concrete in the way they think. Explanations need to be black and white in order for them to better understand and be more open to sharing. “Give them concrete reasons and if there aren’t any, I encourage parents to evaluate for themselves why they are encouraging the child to share in the first place,” she said.

