



“It’s Mine” Sharing and Turn Taking in Toddlerhood

Sharing and turn taking can be very difficult for toddlers. They are just learning social rules and how to behave with other children. They may be beginning to understand the concept of ownership (mine!!), but their egocentric thought leads them to conclude that they own everything! Toddlers still believe they are the center of the universe, and this egocentric thought prevents them from fully understanding another person’s needs. Toddlers also have limited impulse control, so it’s amazing that they share or take turns at all!

How can you help your toddler learn to share and take turns?

- Don’t expect your young toddler to take turns and share. Toddlers often don’t understand what sharing and turn taking means. They might not have the impulse control to wait or give up a favorite toy. Expect and accept that there will be problems, then you won’t be upset when they happen.
- Model good sharing and turn taking. Toddlers can and do learn from example. Show them how to share by modeling it for them. (“You can have half of my banana.” “You go first, I’ll wait for my turn second.”)
- Let your child know that sharing and turn taking are hard. “I know you want the truck. It’s hard to wait. You’re trying so hard!”
- Teach and model empathy. Show your child the effects of her behavior on others, but don’t force an apology. Teach your toddler about empathy by your words and actions. (“When you took the crayons, Ana felt very sad. Poor Ana.”) This is more effective than demanding an “I’m sorry.”
- Praise attempts and successes. “What a great job waiting.” “I know you tried very hard to wait for your turn. I bet you’ll be able to do it next time.”
- Make sharing and turn taking a game. “Let’s play catch, your turn first.” “We’ll sing while we wait. I bet we can think of ten songs to sing!”
- Set a timer. “You can play with the bike for five minutes, then when the bell rings, it’s your brother’s turn.”

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