



Teaching Children to Cooperate

“What can I do with this child? When the other children are working on an art project, she doesn’t want to do it. When I ask her if she’s ready for lunch, she always says no. When everyone wants to play outside, she throws a tantrum. When will this child learn to cooperate?” — *A frustrated caregiver*

Learning to cooperate means that a person can think about and balance their own needs and wants with another person’s needs and wants. Many people think that cooperation means the child does what the adult wants. That’s not the case. True cooperation is a give and take between people that ends up with something they both agree on.

Cooperation is a skill that must be learned. Here are some things you can do with the children in your care to help them learn the skill of cooperation.

Taking turns. Babies as young as six to nine months can begin learning to take turns. Start by playing games with a baby where you do something, then ask her to do the same thing. You drop a

block in a bucket, and then give her a block to put in the bucket. As the baby gets a little older, try rolling a ball to her and have her roll it back to you. For toddlers and preschool-age children, taking turns is a good way to help two children who want to play with the same toy at the same time. Tell the child who had the truck first, “Carla, you were playing with the truck, but Julio wants to play with it too. Would you tell Julio when you are finished playing with it, so he can take a turn?”

Teach children the skills to learn how to cooperate.



Cooperation
is give and take
between people.



Explain the rules. Children as young as two can begin to understand simple reasons. When you remind children of a rule, give them a simple reason. "Please stand back from the stove. It is hot and you could get burned." "Keep your feet on the floor, so you don't kick anyone and hurt them."

Problem-solve with children. You hear it every day. "He did this. She did that." With your help, children as young as three can begin to solve their own problems. Try these three easy steps for problem solving:

1. Ask each child to name the problem by saying, "You two are having

a problem. What is it?"

2. Ask each child for ways to solve the problem by saying, "What can we do?"

3. Make sure that both children agree to the solution.

Give children choices. Giving children choices helps them feel like they have some power. "Do you want a peanut butter sandwich or peanut butter and raisins?" "Would you like to sit with us to hear a story or go to the table and color?" These are good choices for children to make. Be careful not to give choices when the child doesn't really have a choice. "Do you want to take a nap?" is not a good question if you want all the chil-

dren to take naps now. "We're going to have lunch now, OK?" What if the child says, "No, I want to play some more?" Make sure you can agree with any choices you give to a child.

Give ideas, not commands. From around age two, children are learning to be independent. They like to feel they have some control and power. When you say to a child, "It looks like you are finished eating. Have you had enough to eat?" you give the child the right to decide if he wants to eat more. If you say, "Clean your plate, there's still some food on it," you set the stage for a power struggle with that child.

Give praise for cooperating. Be sure to point out what was done and why it is important. "John and Emily, you worked together to pick up those blocks and put them away. Working together makes the job easier." "Kendra, you hung up your coat without me asking you to do it. That helps me and no one will step on it."



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Developed by Lyn Horning, Better Kid Care Program

Dr. James E. Van Horn, Better Kid Care Program Director

Developed by Penn State Better Kid Care Program

253 Easterly Parkway, State College, PA 16801 • Phone: 1-800-452-9108 • Website: betterkidcare.psu.edu.

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