

Parenting Together

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Teaching Children the Important Skill of Cooperation

Cooperating is about working together and helping others. When children cooperate, they have more positive social interactions and are better able to make and keep friends. Parents have the ability to help their children develop the skills needed for a lifetime of friendships and positive social connections by teaching and encouraging cooperation skills from an early age. Here are some tips for fostering cooperativeness in young children:

1. Help kids understand what cooperation means

Cooperation is a big word and a complicated skill. One way to help children cooperate is to break this complex skill down into smaller, easier to understand steps. For example, you could tell your child cooperation means 1) taking turns, 2) working together, and 3) sharing. By breaking complicated skills, like cooperation, into manageable parts, parents can teach and support each step and children can feel more successful along the way.



2. Model cooperation skills at home and with friends

Parents can also help their children learn how to cooperate by modeling adult cooperation with family and friends. For instance, parents can do things like ask nicely, take turns, and invite others to work together. Modeling not only helps teach kids what cooperation looks like, it also demonstrates your belief in the importance and value of cooperation.

When you model cooperation, your children will likely follow your lead.

3. Role-play how to cooperate

Role-playing can be a great way to teach cooperation because it allows parents to support their child's skill development, no matter how advanced or challenged. When your child has difficulty cooperating in a particular situation or with a particular peer, spend some time role-playing. Explain that other kids will want to keep playing with your child when he cooperates by doing things like taking turns, sharing, and working together. By providing your child with this supportive practice, you can help him develop new skills and be more successful at cooperating in the future.



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4. Use specific praise to encourage children's efforts to cooperate

When parents pay attention to their child's cooperation skills, their child is more likely to use these skills again in the future. Parents can pay attention by using specific praise when their child cooperates.

FOR EXAMPLE:
“Nice job taking turns and cooperating with your sister”
OR
“I really appreciate how you are working together to finish this puzzle with your friends.”

Remember, your child's cooperation skills do not have to be perfect before you provide some praise. Cooperation is a complex skill, so praising children's efforts along the way toward mastery can keep them growing and developing.



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GAME TIME!

BALLOON BOP

Start by standing in a circle, holding hands. Someone drops one balloon into the circle. The goal is for players to see how many times they can tap the balloon into the air keeping it up in the air, without losing connection (everyone must continue holding hands)

***Tap the balloon with hands, arms, heads, shoulders, chests, or knees—but NO feet**

5. Plan activities that encourage kids to cooperate

Even though cooperating can be difficult, it can also be fun. One way parents can make cooperation fun is by planning games and activities that encourage kids to work together (like the one shown above!). For instance, you could have kids work together to keep a balloon off the floor as long as possible by taking

turns to tap the balloon with their hands, head, or feet. Not only is this game fun for children, it also provides you with lots of opportunities to model and praise cooperative efforts. It's a win for you and your children!

Teaching children how to cooperate early really sets them up for long-term success with friendships and more!

The Book Nook

My Friend and I

By Lisa Jahn-Clough

The Little Red Fort/El Fuertecito Rojo

By Brenda Maier

The Blackout/El Apagón

By John Rocco

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