

TIP SHEET

Sharing

Sharing is an important social skill that is difficult to learn for many children (e.g., “Would I give another child my toys, if I can have them all to myself instead?”).

Children often become very attached to certain toys and may have a hard time letting other children play with them. They may become aggressive – kicking, biting, or hitting other children – to protect their favourite things.

As toddlers get a little older and start to engage in parallel and co-operative play, they are more likely to be willing to share their toys. But they will still need adult help to give their favourite toy to another child and to wait for their turn to come again.

As an Early Childhood Educator, you likely spend a lot of time helping your students learn how to share and you probably have some tricks up your sleeve. We have provided two additional strategies that might be useful in supporting children who are learning to share their toys.

Helping Children Learn How to Share

1) Social Stories

What are Social Stories?

Social Stories (created by Carol Gray) are a tool for teaching social skills to children. Social Stories clearly describe challenging social situations and provide suggestions about how to behave. The goal of a Social Story is to increase the child’s understanding of a specific social situation and to offer alternative, appropriate responses to it. By giving the child some perspective on the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours of others, Social Stories can help the child better predict and understand social situations.



How do I use a Social Story?

It is best to use a Social Story when the child is calm and focused. Try reading and talking about the Social Story daily (perhaps at the beginning of the day) so that the child is able to really understand the story. Do not use a Social Story when the challenging situation is actually happening.

Social Stories are always written from the child’s perspective, using positive language in the first person, (“I”) and in the present tense:

CORRECT: I sit quietly on my mat during circle time.

INCORRECT: Cheryl must not talk during circle time.

Sharing, continued

When writing a Social Story, make sure that you only mention what the child should be doing, not what she should not be doing:

CORRECT: I tidy up when I'm finished playing.

INCORRECT: I don't leave a mess after I'm finished playing.

Before writing a Social Story, be sure that:

- it focuses on teaching one **behaviour** or skill,
- you have talked to the **child's parents** and **other child care staff** to get their input, as they may have some unique insight into the situation,
- when possible, the **child is involved** in writing his/her own Social Story,
- it is written at the appropriate **level** for the child and has **visual supports**, if necessary.

Depending on the child's skill level, you can write a Social Story using words only or you can add pictures or photographs. Here is an example of how to use a Social Story to teach a child to share:

I love building bridges with wooden blocks.
I like to use a lot of blocks.

Juan Carlos also likes to build with the blocks. Sometimes, he asks me, "Can I use some blocks, please?"

I can give Juan Carlos some blocks.

Now I have some blocks and Juan Carlos has some blocks.

Now I have some blocks and Juan Carlos has some blocks.

We are sharing the blocks. It is fun to share toys with my friends.

2) Role-Playing

What is role-playing?

Role-playing is an interactive strategy that can be used to address many social skills. Role-playing consists of acting out various social interactions that children would typically encounter. Teachers first model the skill and then the children practice it by acting it out. Puppets or other toys can be used as "actors" in the role-play.

Children should have an opportunity to play each of the roles, as well as to be an observer.

Role playing teaches children the actual words they can say and the things they can do in specific situations. It also gives children an opportunity to practice these new skills with their peers.

How do I use role-playing to teach children to share toys?

• Step 1 – Model the skill

Two or more adults model a situation in which one asks the other to share his toys. The specific phrases and behaviours that the child needs to learn are modeled.

Role-play a few possible scenarios so that children are prepared for different situations:

Scenario 1

Teacher A is playing with two cars.

Teacher B asks, "Can I play with a car, please?"

Teacher A says, "Sure. You can have one and I'll have one," and hands one car to Teacher B.

Scenario 2

Teacher A is playing with two cars.

Teacher B asks, "Can I play with a car, please?"

Teacher A says, "No, I want to play with them both."

Teacher B says, "OK. Can I play with them later when you are finished?"

Teacher A says, "OK."

Teacher B goes to find something else to do in the meantime.

Sharing, continued

- **Step 2 – Select role players**

At first, it is best to have children who are more experienced at the skill to do the role-play and have the other children watch and comment.

If possible, give all interested children a turn to do the role-play. It is especially important that the child who is having difficulty has a turn to be part of the role-play.

- **Step 3 – Children do the role-play**

A small group does the role-play and the other children watch and comment.

After seeing a few examples, the child who is having trouble with the specific skill can be part of the role-play. The child should play many different parts in the role-play.

Encourage the children to role-play different scenarios and outcomes (e.g., when someone says, “No, you can’t share my toys.”)

- **Step 4 – Provide feedback**

Children and adults give feedback to the role-players. Remember, you are modeling how to give positive feedback. Give specific, positive feedback to all children involved in the role-play. For example, “I liked how Ali asked Rebecca if he could use a crayon and how well Rebecca shared the crayons.”

We hope that these strategies will give you some ideas about how to support children who are learning to share their toys. After all, sharing is a social skill that we use throughout our lifetime so let’s teach children when they are young to learn this skill.

For more information:

- Learn more about using [Creating Social Stories](#).
- Take a look at some of the other social skills in this section such as: [Getting Someone’s Attention](#), [Listening to Others](#), [Turn Taking](#), [Joining in Play](#) and [Personal Space](#).
- Visit our workshop on [Sharing and Turn Taking](#).