

TIP SHEET

Turn Taking



Young children are often expected to take turns. They might have to take turns with a toy, wait for their turn to talk, or wait to get an adult's attention.

Taking turns can be very challenging, but it is an important social skill for children to learn. Like any other skill, turn taking can be taught.

Some children are able to understand, learn, and use this skill without too much assistance. For other children, taking turns can be extremely difficult. Waiting for a turn to talk or play a game – even if the wait is just a few minutes – might be more than some children can handle. Waiting for a favourite toy and then having to give it up after playing with it for a while, can be even more challenging.

As an Early Childhood Educator, you are probably teaching your students to take turns throughout the day. For example, during “Show and Tell” you encourage the children to wait for their turn to present

their toy or to ask questions. You may also support children who want to play with a toy and have to take turns with another child.

We have included two additional strategies that might be especially helpful for children who have a very difficult time taking turns. Remember that these strategies can be used with all your students.

Helping Children Learn How to Take Turns

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

Turn Taking, continued

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 Social Stories?

It is best to use a Social Story when the child is calm and focused. Do not try to use a Social Story when the challenging situation is actually happening. 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.

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.

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.

Remember that, depending on the child's skill level, you can write a Social Story using words only or you can add pictures or photographs. Here

are examples of how to use a Social Story to teach a child to take turns with a favourite toy:

My name is Keisha.

I love playing with the big, red truck.

Jose likes to play with the red truck, too.

Jose pushes the truck on the floor and puts blocks in it.

When Jose is playing with the truck, I can say, "Can I have a turn, please?"

I wait until he is finished his turn.

It is OK to wait.

My teacher will help me stay calm while I wait for my turn.

My teacher is happy when I wait for my turn.

When Jose is finished, it is my turn.

I have fun playing with the truck.

I can remember to ask Jose for a turn and to wait.

2) Social Games

What are Social Games?

Many children's games involve some kind of social interaction. Games are a fun, natural, non-intrusive way for children to learn and practice social skills. Many games can be modified to encourage the development of social skills.

You can teach children to take turns using simple games and activities. Remember to use the word "turn" during these activities. For example, "It's Andre's turn to put a block on," or, "Wait for your turn. It's Sarah's turn now". Also, make sure to positively reinforce children for taking turns. Here are some examples of activities that can encourage turn taking:

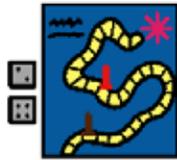
Block Building – each child can have his own pile of blocks or share a common pile of blocks. The children build a tower together by adding one block to the



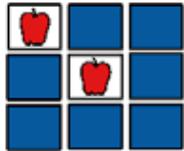
Turn Taking, continued

tower at a time – taking turns to put the blocks on the tower.

Simple board games (such as Candyland and Snakes and Ladders) and card games (such as Go Fish) are great for practicing turn taking.



Memory Game – in this game, children must wait for their turn to flip over a card.



Group Games – In these activities, children must wait for their turn to be the “leader” -

I went to market and I bought...

I spy...

Follow the leader...

Twenty questions.



Taking turns is an important social skill for all children to learn as it allows them to play co-operatively with their peers. With a little bit of practice and plenty of your support, children can learn to master this social skill.

For more information:

- Learn more about [Creating Social Stories](#).
- Take a look at some of the other social skills in this such as: [Getting Someone's Attention](#), [Listening to Others](#), [Sharing](#), [Joining in Play](#) and [Personal Space](#).
- Visit our workshops on [Playing to Learn](#), [Sharing and Turn Taking](#), and [Visual Communication](#) for more ideas on building social skills and using visual supports in your classroom.