

How can I help my child get along with others?

MAKING FRIENDS:

Learning to share is one of the hardest jobs in life

That's mine!" are typical words from young children playing together. Meanwhile, parents imagine how smooth playdates would be if children would just share. Learning to share takes time and children need the understanding and support of adults to be able to share easily. Below are several ways to help children develop the ability to share.

- **Recognize that children share more often than we realize.** Toys are not the only things children share. They also share space, adults, food, ideas and power with friends. Remember to appreciate how much is really happening when playdates occur! Praise your child's efforts to share. "You shared your room with Sam for a long time."

- **Sharing is a developmental process. It can't really be taught.** Sharing doesn't come naturally, especially to two-year-olds. They are aware of themselves, not the feelings of others. Their play is usually side by side. By three, children are more cooperative and can wait a little for a turn. Not until four can they begin to talk through conflicts with peers.

- **Use materials that are easier to share and don't require adults.** Blocks, playdough and books are a good choice for twos and threes. Offer a couple of paper bags to play store, or two toy telephones. Fours and fives like artwork, dress-up, or making a simple snack together. Play games that promote turn-taking. Chase games and ball play involve changing roles. This helps young children get used to a give-and-take relationship.

- **Assure children that sharing a toy doesn't mean losing it forever.** Young children need to know that a toy (or a parent's attention) is still theirs, even when someone else has it. Sharing can happen only when children are sure that they still own the object, and will get it back.

- **Introduce a problem-solving approach.** With two and three year olds, this may mean suggesting a solution. "Tommy can fill the watering can, then Julie can pour the water." You can ask fours and fives to come up with their own sharing plan, while you hold the watering can.

- **Pay attention to the way you talk to children about your possessions.** Explain why you won't "share" some of your things. Instead of "You can't have that, it's mommy's," try "I would share my necklaces with you but it breaks easily and we would both feel sad if all the beads fell off."

- **Teach consideration of others within your family.** "You had a turn to read with mommy. Now it's your sister's turn."