



Cooperation Teaches Cooperation

Cooperating is a skill that leads to positive relationships and to success in school and life. The best way to teach your child to cooperate is to cooperate with him. You do this when you do the following:



Take turns, back and forth, during *Everyday Moments*.

You teach your child this as you talk and listen to each other, turn the pages of the book, roll a ball back and forth, fill and dump small blocks from a bucket, stir the pancake batter, or put toys back on the shelf.



Work as a team to do chores together.

Work together as partners as you change your baby's diaper (watch and you will see him lift his bottom so you can put a new diaper in place), find and fold the washcloths in the laundry basket, set the table, water the plants, and write a shopping list.



Model and problem-solve together.

For example, when your toddler's noodles are too hot, talk about how you might cool them (e.g., wait, blow on them, stir them around with a spoon).



Notice and comment on cooperation.

Be specific about what your child does and why it matters. "Thank you for helping me carry the laundry basket into the living room. It is easier when there are two of us working together."



Give your child some say.

Offer realistic choices between two options. For example, "Would you like to wear your red shoes or the blue ones with polka dots?" or "Do you want cooked carrots or cauliflower on your plate?" or "Would you like to put on your socks or do you want me to help you?"



Partner With Your Child to Teach Cooperation

Being aware of what your child might be thinking is the first step in being her partner to teach her about cooperation. There is a lot going on in that little, sweet head. A lot. Always.

To teach her about cooperating and to help her be successful try the following:



Have realistic expectations.

Learning to cooperate will take years of practice. Think about some adults you know. They are still figuring it out!



Get her attention.

Say her name. Look her in the eye. Kneel down next to her.



Invite her to cooperate clearly and politely.

"Will you please carry your cars across the room. Put them on the shelf next to the bottle caps."



Give her a few minutes warning, then repeat your request.

"I can see you having fun racing the cars. This is the 3-2-1 minute warning."
After you count down to one, say again what you are asking her to do.



Join her in starting, or completing, the task as needed.

"How about I pick up the red car and you get the yellow car? Then we can take them over to the shelf together."



Notice and appreciate the steps she takes to cooperate.

"I notice you have taken one car to the shelf. Thank you for cooperating. Now can you get the other one?"



When She Can't or Won't Cooperate

Most of the time when a young child doesn't cooperate, it is because she can't. Perhaps she doesn't yet have the ability to easily move from one activity to another. Maybe she is at the age when she has to test boundaries to learn who is who. She may be tired or hungry, which can make life harder for both of you. Maybe she is overwhelmed with big feelings.

Believe it or not, your child wants to please you. She wants to do things well. She wants to be like you. Here are some ways to figure this out together to have a win-win experience as often as possible:



Stay calm.

This is just one of hundreds of thousands of interactions and opportunities to teach her about cooperation.



Let her decide.

Give her a sense of control by offering two acceptable options: "Would you like to put away the cars in 2 minutes or 3 minutes?"



Turn it into a game.

Invite her to race her cars to the shelf or to see which one will get there first.



Be willing to back off sometimes instead of forcing the issue.

"OK. Then for tonight, park your cars by the shelf."



If big feelings take over, reconnect.

Talk about what happened: "You got so upset, you started screaming and threw one of your cars. Daddy got angry and yelled at you. How about we both take 10 breaths and start over."