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TEACH YOUR YOUNG CHILDREN TO SHARE

THROUGH EARLY LESSONS IN COOPERATION

COOPERATION IS A BASIC LIFE SKILL

that allows us to make friends, work successfully in groups, and get along well with others. Babies are not born knowing how to cooperate or share. This ability is learned through interactions and experiences with parents and other significant caregivers. Around age three, children begin to practice real cooperation through their play by sharing and taking turns.

“Cooperation and sharing are key character traits that teach children how to get along with others,” says Dr. Mary Zurn, vice president of education for Primrose Schools. “Parents and teachers encourage and model these traits because they are critical for children to understand. They help children to form friendships and to have harmonious and respectful interactions with others. Sharing is a necessary daily activity that builds a foundation for positive character development, and is a common thread that runs through caring, cooperation, generosity, and citizenship.”

Dr. Zurn offers parents a few tips to teach children cooperation skills at home:

- MODEL COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOR:** You are your child’s first teacher, and your behavior greatly influences the way your child acts and feels. Modeling cooperative behavior and talking to your child about “lending a helping hand” sets the expectation that these are important values. For example, you can say, “If we work together to clean up the kitchen after dinner, we’ll all be able to listen to the new book-on-tape you borrowed from the library.”
- FAMILY PROJECTS:** Plan a family project that includes a task for each family member, such as starting a vegetable or flower garden, mapping out the family vacation, or playing a game. Help them see the fun in working together to accomplish a goal.
- COOPERATION SOUP:** Cooking is a perfect time to learn about cooperation because children can actively help by gathering ingredients, measuring, mixing, and then serving and eating. Read the story of *Stone Soup* and discuss how the soldiers tricked everyone in the village into contributing to a wonderful pot of soup that all could enjoy.
- BOOK CLUB:** Introduce the concept of cooperation by reading books about characters who share, such as *The Little Red Hen*. Discuss what happens at the end of the story. Ask your child to tell you how they would respond if someone asked them to cooperate on a project.
- MAKING MUSIC:** The way children respond to music is magical. Listen to a short piece of music and discuss how the members of the chorus, band, or orchestra worked together to make a beautiful sound. It’s easy to gather a simple set of rhythm instruments that children can use to keep time with the music or just sing along with a song on a CD. If you record their production, they will love hearing it over and over, knowing that they accomplished it together. 🎵



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