



## **The Myth Of Sharing**

Parents, picture this scene: Your folks stop by to visit with two people you don't know, but are close to your age. Your dad says, "Give me your car keys, please. John saw your new car and he wants to take it for a spin. I know you'd want to share. Oh, and Sue wants to wear your earrings, the diamond ones. Now, let's be nice and share."

Yikes! There are some things we don't want to share and we would be upset if someone suggested we should. Some items are personal, or the risk of damage is too high. We wouldn't want to pay for our wrecked car or lost jewelry. Of course, there are items that we can feel comfortable sharing when there are clear expectations and consequences.

Young children feel the same way about sharing. Before age six (until the first tooth falls out), children are in a developmental stage of self-mastery. Child initiated activities of the three to six-year old build concentration and skills through repetition. These activities also have an observable beginning, middle and end. For example, if your child was working on a building project and was asked to share his blocks in the middle of the job, he might express frustration; just as we might if someone

took our keys while we were driving.

After the age of six, group work instead of self-mastery becomes the focus of the child's activities. Sharing an activity is now developmentally appropriate and actually aids in the learning process. Before the age of six, the child is focused on developing individual skills and can feel violated if we allow others to use his or her things. You may recall from your growing-up experience or from watching your children interact, that many sibling arguments arise from touching, using, or borrowing a brother's or sister's personal items.

Having a simple rule can eliminate many of these conflicts. When someone is using an item no one else may touch it, unless they ask permission from the user. A no answer must be respected. Defining an area for the activity by using a small rug or placemat will help make it visually clear what items are being used. The user is finished with an item when it is back on the shelf, ready for the next person to use it.

Certain toys, such as building blocks, puzzles and board games, can be designated as family toys. Family toys can be kept on low shelves. Family toys are used much like a community shares

resources such as a library, pool and parks. We all can't check out the same book at once, but we can take turns and share. We have common ownership with explicit rules and expectations.

Personal toys can be kept in bedrooms. One family uses their locked hall closet to keep toys that are not to be touched by anyone but the owner.

Having family toys also makes it easier to have no-tears activities for visiting children. Visitors can choose an activity after they have been told the rules about not touching other's things and putting things away when finished.

Understanding what sharing really means can help us foster a sense of family community with our children. Knowing what is age appropriate along with clear rules and expectations for usage can help our children avoid conflict and tears.

### **Rules for Family Toys**

1. Choose your activity.
2. Work on a rug or mat. (Define your work activity.)
3. Ask permission to touch anyone's activity.
4. Put your activity away when you're finished.