



BEST BEHAVIOUR

It's not unusual to encounter a toddler who doesn't want to share.

Sue Cowley suggests some simple but effective techniques you can use to help develop empathy...

Young children have very little sense of how other people feel. They are at the centre of their own worlds, where their desires are the most important thing of all. We need to help them develop the skill of empathy – to learn that their behaviour has an impact on how other people feel. Learning how to share, and take turns, is a key skill in the building of empathy. It means accepting that our own needs and wants cannot always be met immediately, and also seeing that we can put other people's feelings ahead of our own.

The scenario

Charlie is a three-year-old who has recently started at your nursery. He is finding it very difficult to share the toys and resources with the other children. Charlie often snatches toys out of other children's hands and then refuses to give them back. Charlie's mother has recently had a new baby. She has told you that she is finding it difficult to cope with Charlie's unpredictable behaviour at home.

The issue

It seems likely that the arrival of a new baby has unsettled Charlie. He may be subconsciously worried that he has to share his parents with this new person, and be 'acting out' as a result of this. As a recent starter at your nursery, it is also likely that Charlie is not yet fully settled in. For practitioners, there are two issues to consider here: how should you react and deal with a situation where Charlie takes a toy from another child, and how can you support Charlie in learning how to share?

Dealing with the behaviour

It is important to reinforce your rules around sharing and taking turns, and to do this regularly, for instance, during group carpet-time sessions. Ask the children why it is important to share. Talk about how it feels when someone refuses to share something. Ensure that there are visual reminders of your rules displayed around the setting. Have a clear policy, which is shared by all staff, about how you will react when a child refuses to share.

When Charlie snatches a toy off another child, use the following five techniques:

- 1 Talk about the behaviour as being the problem, rather than the child: "Charlie, that behaviour is not nice. We do not snatch toys off other people in our nursery."
- 2 Reinforce the rule that the child should be following: "Remember our rule – 'We always share and take turns.'"
- 3 Make a statement about the behaviour you want to see: "I need you to give the toy back right away. Thank you." (By ending with 'thank you', you let Charlie know that you assume he will do as you have asked – sometimes it works!)
- 4 If Charlie refuses to do as you have asked, explain the choice that he needs to make: "Charlie, you have a choice. Give the toy back straight away and we can all carry on playing. If you won't give the toy back, then I will have to ask you to come and sit on our thinking spot to have a talk."
- 5 If Charlie still refuses to comply, guide him away from the situation and take him somewhere quiet to have a chat. At our setting we use a 'thinking spot' (a round rug) where the

child and practitioner can go to talk about problem behaviour.

Finding solutions

As well as dealing with the problem behaviour when it happens, look for ways to support Charlie in learning how to share. Here are some suggestions:

- Ensure that Charlie has time to build his relationship with his key person. Make sure that his key person is there to greet him when he arrives at nursery, and that he or she has a chance to meet with Charlie's parents to talk.
- Let Charlie bring a toy or comforter of his own into nursery, so that he has something familiar that he knows he will not have to share.
- Play group games in which the children have to share, in order for the game to be successful. For instance, parachute games or activities where the children have to pass a ball around the circle.
- Praise examples of good sharing and turn taking when you see them. Try to catch Charlie being good so that you can highlight his positive behaviour.
- Have a reward in place for Charlie when you see him sharing or taking turns. You might add a 'WOW' message to his Learning Journey or have a special sticker.
- Suggest to Charlie's parents that it might work well to set aside some quality time to spend with Charlie on his own. Perhaps a friend or family member can look after the new baby so that he can spend some one-to-one time with Mum and Dad.



about the author

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