



How to Help Your Child Learn to Trade

When a child sees another child playing with a toy they want, their first instinct may be to take it. This behaviour can be frustrating to playmates and often leads to an argument. Trading is a solution that children can choose as a way to get an object from someone else in a positive way and is a great first step in learning how to share. Trading is also a skill that must be taught and practiced many times. However, once your child is



comfortable trading with others it can make them feel empowered. Knowing how to trade helps children to positively express their emotions and confidently solve their own problems without help from an adult. Unlike sharing, where children must wait to use a toy, trading is a solution that allows both people to feel happy with the outcome right away. It takes patience and guidance to help your child learn how to negotiate with playmates by themselves, but it is a valuable skill that they will use throughout their life.

Suggestions for Families

Play with the skill of trading. “I have a blue block. Can I trade for your red one?” Begin with objects that mean little to your child or objects that are similar to each other so they can practice how to work their way through the interaction, rather than worry about the object itself and who has it. For example, trade pencils, crackers or blocks rather than a favorite blanket or stuffed animal.

Puppets, trains, dolls and cars can also be used to practice how to trade. “Oh, no! Thomas the Train does not like bananas. Can Bertie trade him for the strawberry?” The follow-up to this interaction is also important. “Wow! Now they are both happy and have food they like.”

Trading can be useful when working through disagreements between siblings. “I know how frustrating it can be when your brother takes your special car. Look, here is another one! Tell your brother, ‘We can trade!’”

Use trading as a possible solution for problems. “There are two children and only one basketball. Would you like to play together or trade for the soccer ball?”

Suggestions for Educators

In early learning and care settings, children are supported to learn how to trade through role-play or puppet shows before they are expected to trade by themselves. Children are encouraged to use trading as a way to solve problems that come up when they play with peers. Educators give the children many opportunities to practice the skill during the day. For example, an educator may intentionally set out two colors of paint at an activity table for two children. After the children use the first paint, the educator might suggest that the children trade to try a new color. Or, if the children initiate the trade themselves, the educator can compliment them on successfully using a new skill.

The Bottom Line

Knowing how to trade is the first skill a child can use to work together with others. Trading helps children learn how to use their words to engage in conversations with peers and is the first step in learning how to negotiate. Your child will find trading very useful as they become interested in the people and things around them and develop opinions about what they like. Trading allows children to value their own desires while balancing the needs and rights of others.

