

Childcare and Parenting

11

Series

Making Friends



Online Version



Family Health Service
Department of Health

Social Development of the 2- to 3-Year-Olds

After the second birthday, your child will show marked changes in his social development. Instead of playing side by side with other children, he may begin to chase, imitate and play together with them. When interacting with peers, they gradually learn to acquire basic social skills like manners, turn taking, sharing and conflict resolving. This learning process lays the foundation for successful family and social relationships in the future.

It all Begins in the Family

Family is the best place for young children to learn social skills. As the two-year-olds like to imitate adults, parents can teach them basic social skills by setting a good example.



Encouraging politeness at home:

- Show your child what good social manners are by saying, 'Good morning', 'Good night', or 'Bye bye' to one another in the family at appropriate times.
- Demonstrate when to say 'Thank you' and 'Please'. Ask your child to do so at appropriate times such as when she is asking for what she wants.
- Encourage her to say 'hello' to people. If she is too shy to say it, greeting by using eye contact, nodding, waving or shaking hands can do.





Setting house rules about sharing, turn taking and cooperating:

- Make use of snack time to teach him sharing or turn taking, e.g. 'Here are two pieces of cake. One for you and one for Timmy.' 'Daddy will pour some milk for sister, and then it'll be your turn.'
- Practice turn taking during play such as by asking him to push a car to and fro between the two of you; or encouraging him to participate in block building.
- Invite him to participate in tidying up after play.
- Never ask the elder siblings or other family members to give way to the young ones. It will only deprive the latter of the chance to learn to be considerate while encouraging them to remain self-centred.



Creating fun in the family:

- Encourage her to join in games with her siblings instead of playing alone.
- Play group games together like 'London Bridge' and 'Ring-Around-the-Rosie'.

Building Up Social Experiences

The two-year-olds may not have much social exposure especially if they are the only child at home. You may extend his social experiences by:

- Taking him out for different social contacts, e.g. going to the market, visiting your neighbours and meeting with friends.

- Helping him to form his own peer groups by going to the playground to meet with other children, going to birthday parties, inviting children over to play, or going to a playgroup or a preschool.



Getting Along with Friends

A two-year-old has not yet developed a clear time concept. She is only concerned about the here-and-now. She may think that her toy will be gone if others ask to share it. Even when she has progressed to the point of sharing with others at around three, she will only lend her toys to selected friends — just as what you would do with your precious possession.

Under your patient guidance, she will gradually learn to share and take turns with peers in different situations.



Showing Your Child How to Take Turns:

- Engage your child by talking with him when queuing up for a game. He will not get bored and impatient too early.
- Tell him beforehand for how long he can play, e.g. 'Every one can only play for a short while (or till I count to 20). Then it's the turn of the next one.'

- Prepare the child in advance before the game ends. 'Time is nearly up. Please stop and give turn to the next one after I count to 10. 1, 2, 3...10!'
- Create a fantasy to help your child end the game more pleasantly. 'Time is nearly up. Hurry to park your car.' 'Bye bye, swing. We'll play with you next time.'
- Tell your child that there are other more interesting toys/games, 'Look! How pretty these blocks are! Come and have a look at the animal patterns!'
- Accept his feelings if your child is unwilling to give up the toy/game, 'You really like the trike and want to play for a bit longer, right?' Then lead him to take turns again, 'Let's queue up again.' Alternatively, offer other choices, 'How about playing with the blocks?'



Showing Your Child How to Share with Visitors or When Visiting Others:

- Discuss with your child the toys she can share before visitors arrive. Help her to put away those she does not want to share to avoid unnecessary conflicts.
- Ask your child to bring along some toys which she can share when visiting friends.
- Explain to her that the toy will be returned to her afterwards, 'How about sharing with Rick and let him play with it for a while? He will return it to you when we go home/he goes home.'
- Praise her immediately if she agrees to share, 'Good girl! Thanks for sharing with others. Daddy is really proud of you.'

Common Problems on Getting Along with Friends

1. My child is very shy. How can I help him mix with other children?

Some children are quiet and slow-to-warm-up. They may need more time to adjust to strange situations. If your child is shy, putting pressure on him would only cause more anxiety. Try to understand and accept his characteristics and guide him step-by-step to join in other children's activity:

- ★ Stay with him while watching other children play.
- ★ Show him how to join in other children's play by doing it.
- ★ Invite him to join in if you think he is ready.
- ★ Do not blame or shame him if he refuses to do so. This will only hurt his pride and even keep him further away from people. Show your acceptance by saying, 'I know you prefer to watch a little longer. When you want to play with them, just let me know.'
- ★ If your child starts to join in, wait till he becomes more involved in the activity before you gradually withdraw. Stay aside to keep an eye on how he is engaging and give him encouragement from time to time.

2. How can I stop my child from grabbing toys?

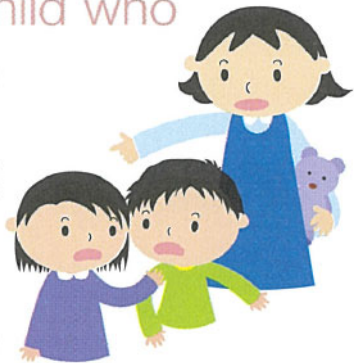
Two-year-olds are still self-centred. They may not be able to perceive other's feelings and thoughts or be independent in problem solving. You may stand aside to observe their interactions with peers at play before deciding to step in:



- ★ If your child has grabbed a toy from another child, it is the time for you to step in immediately. Teach your child the appropriate social skill, 'That is Sue's toy and you shouldn't grab. If you do want to play with it, what should you do?' Lead her to think of different solutions e.g. 'Yes, you could ask nicely.' 'Do you want to exchange your toy for it?' or 'Waiting for your turn is a good idea.'
- ★ If your child is upset by having failed to grab the toy, show her that you understand her feelings, 'You are upset because Sue did not let you play with that toy, right? But that's her toy. She will be upset too if you grab it.' Guide her to think of other solutions. If the other child agrees to give her the toy, remind your child to say 'thank you'. If not, try to divert her attention to other toys or games.
- ★ Do not jump to conclusion and blame any parties. This will not help children learn how to share or solve problems.

3. I don't know what to do with my child who is so aggressive towards his friends.

Toddlers may use hitting, kicking or pushing as a means to get what they want when they do not know other ways to solve problems. They may also become aggressive out of frustration or anger. Your guidance may stop their aggressive behaviour developing into a habit and help them learn to solve problems.



- ★ Talk with your child and set 2 or 3 rules together with him about playing with friends, such as 'take turns' or 'be friendly'. State clearly that the consequence of breaking the rules is to 'have the toy taken away' or "go to 'quiet time' for a minute".

- ★ Praise your child if he plays with others in a friendly way.
- ★ Stop him immediately if he hits others during play, 'Stop hurting Megan! You have to take turn if you want to play with it.'
- ★ Take him to 'quiet time' if he does not stop fighting, i.e. tell him to stay at the edge of the activity and stay quiet for a minute. Leave him there and do not give him any attention.
- ★ Wait till he has stayed quiet for a minute. Then ask him to join in to play again and remind him to follow the rules.
- ★ You may suggest him say sorry and make peace with his friend. Find chances to praise him for being friendly.
- ★ Avoid preaching and never use punitive methods when handling conflicts between children. Only by using the above method firmly and consistently would your child learn to be responsible for his behavior.



Most of the two-year-olds do not follow rules or share toys. This is their characteristic at this stage of development. Getting along with friends in harmony is difficult without help from parents. Your modeling and consistent guidance will help your child learn what he should do in future social encounters.



Family Health Service

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