



How Developmentally Appropriate is Sharing?

Sharing is a very interesting topic. As adults we want children to be generous, self-sacrificing, and aware of other people's needs and desires. These are very adult virtues or concepts and take time and practice to learn. Young children are not born with the innate ability to know what others want or need or to be selfless. They are still figuring these things out for themselves!

Maria Montessori found that children develop through four primary planes of development- ages 0-6, 6-12, 12-18, and 18-24. Each plane of development has a specific point and purpose. It is during the 0-6 plane of development where parents and teachers most often spend a lot of time focusing on sharing.

This is the time of the absorbent mind. It is when a child learns about himself and his environment through active interactions. The 0-6 plane is separated into two sections, the unconscious (0-3 years of age) and the conscious (3-6 years of age). The unconscious stage is solely focused on the construction of self, learning who they are in relations to their environment. Children in this stage are not yet able to take into account another person's actions/choices/desires. They are naturally very selfish but in a matter of constructing themselves. The concept of sharing can seem very alien to children under the age of three. Now as a child gets older, it becomes more appropriate to encourage sharing, though it should still stem from an intrinsic desire to care for others and not be forced.

How do you Teach Sharing?

Set an Example. Living your life in an atmosphere of sharing and selflessness is a great way to start. As the child absorbs from his environment, he or she is exposed to and thus absorbs these values. The values will of course not be evident but we must trust in the child and the absorbent mind! Values can also be taught and practiced. In Montessori classrooms we teach Grace and Courtesy lessons such as how to wait your turn, how to ask for a lesson, how to serve a snack to others, and many more. Through these lessons children learn to use their freedom and make choices within a community. When children have choices, the ability to control their actions and are taught grace and courtesy, they start to act in a more communal and loving way. This gives them a safe base. If we adults are the ones in charge of all this (deciding who gets what, when, where, for how long, when it's time to share, etc...) children feel a loss of control and sharing becomes an extrinsic concept. What we really want is for children to see others who are alone or without a toy and be able to share out of intrinsic love and concern. We want sharing to happen naturally and lovingly. Maria Montessori looked to the child first and we should do the same.