

7 Tips for Raising a Cooperative Child

Cooperation does not mean children doing what adults want. That is compliance. True cooperation means a joint effort – a give and take that is mutually satisfying.

Here are some ways you can help your child develop the skill of cooperating.

1. Take turns. Encourage turn-taking as you play with your baby. When you place a block in the bucket, give him time to copy you. As he gets older, take turns putting pieces in the puzzle or shapes in the shape-sorter. When it's time to clean up, make a game of taking turns putting toys away. He will enjoy being part of a team.

2. Explain your reasons for limits and requests. Point out how rules benefit the whole family. "We all help clean up. Then we don't lose our toys, and we can find them again."



3. Take time to problem-solve. You can help your older two- and three-year-olds come up with solutions to everyday dilemmas and encourage cooperation at the same time. Here are steps to help you teach problem-solving skills to your child:

- State the problem. "You want to draw on the wall, but mommy says no."
- Ask a question. "Where else could you draw?"
- Try a solution. Offer two options – both of which are acceptable to you – perhaps either paper or a cardboard box. If she insists she wants to draw on the refrigerator, set a limit. "I'll put the crayons away until we agree on a place to draw."
- Then re-direct. Most young children need help finding acceptable ways they can channel their desires. "You can put magnetic letters on the refrigerator."



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4. Do chores together starting at an early age. Let your child grow up experiencing the benefits of cooperation. Together you can set the table, clean up toys or wash the car. Point out the advantages of cooperating. "Boy was it fun to wash the car with you. You are a great scrubber! Look how bright and shiny you made our car!"



- 5. Give specific praise for cooperative efforts.** Point out how and why your child's contribution was important. This helps him recognize and value his skills. "You picked out all the white socks and put them together. That helped me finish the laundry quicker. Now we have more time to play."
- 6. Offer suggestions, not commands.** Suggestions elicit cooperation. Commands often evoke resistance. "It is cold so you will need to wear a hat. Would you like help putting it on, or do you want to do it yourself?" This is likely to bring about a better response than saying, "Put on your hat."
- 7. Give your child choices while maintaining the rules.** "Teeth need to be brushed at bedtime. Do you want to do it before we read books or after?" Of course, they almost always choose to do it after, but they're less likely to protest, and the rule is still adhered to. Offering choices shows your child respect, and respect creates a sense of partnership.



Resource: Zero to Three, National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families