

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* for Early Learners: A complete social skills foundation course



Lesson 4: Cooperation

After the Buzz offers hands-on ideas for parents, guardians and educators to reinforce the social thinking generated in the lesson. Here are a few easy to use ideas to teach children how-to play, work and live more cooperatively. Children can grow this essential social skill, but it takes practice, patience, and the consistent guidance of adults at home and at school.

Some children take longer to polish cooperative skills

Make sure that you are asking too much too early of your child. Developmentally, some children take longer to mature and require thoughtful coaching for longer. They remain dependent on adults to demonstrate cooperative skills and break them down into smaller bite size steps. Encourage every attempt your child makes to cooperate with genuine enthusiasm. When they make an error focus on the positives you've seen, and gently show them how to improve.

Getting the best from kids

Always be sure your child has heard the request. Some children, particularly when engaged in something they enjoy, need to be approached and gently touched on the shoulder before they hear a request. Next, use their name, make eye contact and state the request. Use a voice that is calm and direct. Avoid calling out what you want from another room.

Similarly, it's a sensible idea to give children a transition or changeover time. You might say, "Stella, it's nearly time to help me set the table. Can you come and help me in a moment?" Then a minute or two later walk back to Stella and say, "Here are the knives and forks. I'll do the plates. Come on!"

When your child is grumpy and refuses to cooperate give them a couple of minutes to settle down and compose their emotions. You might say, "I can see you're cross and you don't want to pack your toys away. Once you're feeling happier I need you to pack them away, and I can help." Give them a few minutes before asking again. If your child continues to seek control and will not cooperate move to giving them a straightforward choice. Simply state, "You choose. I'll pop the blocks away and you put the books away. We'll do it together. If you choose not to help then you won't get to see the next episode on your DVD tonight."

Model cooperative behaviour

It's a good idea state your cooperative deeds casually as they occur. For example, during a hike in the country, you might help others through the wire fence and say, "Ben and I will hold the wire apart so everyone can get through more easily." Also, speak openly and often about being helpful to one another in family conversations. Take it to the next level and list ways everyone can work together so the family tasks done quickly so there is more time for fun. Ask questions to raise your children's awareness. For example, "Blake has lost his shoes. What can we do to help?"

Plan events that encourage kids to work together

The idea is to teach children about cooperation through planning real life activities. Examples include:



Cooking; small group cooking activities are an enjoyable way to show kids how-to build cooperative skills. Organise a recipe with ingredients and steps presented in stages. Allocate roles to each child such as - calculating the flour and dispensing it, counting the correct number of eggs and cracking them open, pouring the milk, greasing the pan, stirring and so on. During the activity children, quite naturally, have to wait their turn, follow directions and share responsibility for creating something they can enjoy later.

Gardening; whether it's weeding a garden bed, planting seeds, striking cuttings or planting small punnets of flowers or vegetables, children can be assigned individual tasks so the group effort turns out well. Gardening is one of those multi-tasked activities that offer the chance for cooperative and shared responsibilities. Once the immediate task is done there's further scope to roster each of the children to water the seeds, seedlings or plants.

Art; group art projects provide a great opportunity for dividing up roles and responsibilities, and creating a lasting reminder of cooperation. Select a theme. Then, have the children each search for pictures in magazines that are connected to the theme. If the goal is to create a community scene or a mural, assign roles and get them to contribute to it by cutting out pictures from magazines, arranging them and drawing.

Literacy; paired, or small group writing projects position kids to share ideas, and to work together. Organise each child so they have a specific role, and match the roles to suit each child's capacity. By doing so everyone is set up to successfully contribute.

Community service ideas; from time to time take unwanted toys, clothing, blankets and so on to charity shops or organisations who help families in unfortunate circumstances. Be sure to physically and emotionally involve your children on this process. Volunteer the family to help with a school or community project every so often. Nudging children to care for others immerses them into the world of contributing and cooperating!

For fun; in the hot weather provide each of the kids with a small bucket. Fill a much larger water container and get them to work cooperatively to water particular flower or vegetable beds.

Toys and games; remember that some toys and games naturally offer scope for children to work together. Be sure to take advantage of a new generation of games loosely called, Cooperative Games for Kids. To win these games everyone has to cooperate to beat the game itself. For children under 8 years play the board games, 'Busy Town,' 'Snail's Pace Race,' 'Count Your Chickens' and 'Hoot Owl Hoot'. They're wonderful! For older children try, 'Forbidden Island' and 'Castle Panic'.

Books and videos with cooperative themes

Koala Lou by Mem Fox (1988) - youtube - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RX2ei_kbSiU

The Enormous Turnip by Robert James (2010) - youtube - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Lq9VysZXkQ>

Frederick by Leo Lionni (1986). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFCLWytjcUY>

The Little Red Hen by Paul Galdone (1973) - youtube - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbR9_8kqaAw

The Seven Chinese Brothers by Margaret Mahy (1990)

Swimmy by Leo Lionni - youtube - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0L8HQ-qSA7I>

Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge by Mem Fox (1984) - youtube -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usnOEnTXabw>

Who Made This Big Mess: a Book About Tidying Up (1999) by Andrew Gutelle

The Best Baby-Sitter Ever (1993) by Richard Scarry - youtube - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NixAVyvkSt0>

Photocopiable and Online Resources

These resources can also be downloaded from www.whatsthebuzz.net.au