

By Barbara Holden  
Special to My Life

“He snatches all the toys. He grabs all the snacks at snack time. He hoards the blocks during recess. And all the while he yells, ‘MINE, MINE, MINE!’

Sound familiar?

You might think I’m talking about your child, but it actually describes the “Mine-o-Saur” in Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen’s popular children’s book bearing the same name.

If you are a parent of a toddler then you know that your baby was born with daddy’s eyes and mamma’s smile, but he wasn’t born with the ability to share.

Sharing possessions is a challenging concept for your child to grasp and teaching him how to share can really test your patience.

Since your child is not born with an innate desire to share, you must teach him. It takes a lot of work, and like most good habits, it won’t happen overnight and is a skill best modeled by example.

It’s not like your little one can help it. Toddlers have not developed a way to see the world from anyone else’s point of view but their own. This is why it is so devastating for your child to see his possessions in the hands of someone else.

So, what are the best ways to teach your child to share? According to the website Parents.com., showing them that *you* share is a powerful place to start.

“Charity, of course, begins at home,” the site says. “Share with your husband in front of your child, point out when others share, and teach your toddler to thank children who let her play with their things.”

You’ve also got to accept the fact that there are some things your child may not be willing to share.

Set clear rules with your child. Let him know that if he has a friend over to play, he will have to share his toys.

Of course, there will be fights. When this happens, take the toy away from both children. Most importantly, stay calm. Explain that you took the toy away because they were unable to share it, so they will both have to find something else to play with.

Praise your child every time he shares. Be specific and associate the action with an emotion. With every act of sharing say, “I like the way you are sharing your book with Mary” or “I love the way you took turns playing with Kevin, I bet that really made him feel good.”

Most toddlers are “pleasers,” which means hearing words praise from you is music to their ears. The more you recognize their actions with specific words of praise, the more they will want to repeat that action in the future.

Additionally, toddlers love to be read to, so look for books at your local library or bookstore that reinforce virtues like sharing and kindness. Some of my favorites include:

The Mine-O-Saur, by Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen (available through the free Imagination Library book program)

Care Bears: The Day Nobody Shared, by Nancy Parent  
Share and Take Turns, by Cheri J. Meiners

I Can Share, by Karen Katz (also available through the Imagination Library)

Is there a magic age when children learn to share? Not really. Two and three year olds might try to share, but find it difficult because they are not capable of understanding how the toy you are playing with right now is still their toy.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that most children will begin sharing with others by age four or five, and reminds us that the ability to share comes with maturity, so the process will be different for each child.

Whatever sharing lessons you choose for your little “Mine-o-Saur,” the most important thing is to ensure that your child sees you doing the things you are asking him to do. Our children learn what they live. And these lessons last a lifetime.

*Barbara Holden is a director at the Urban Child Institute, a Greater Memphis organization dedicated to promoting early childhood development. The Commercial Appeal is a partner with the Urban Child Institute in this effort to help parents and other care givers learn skills that nurture and educate the minds of infants and children. For more information, go to [www.theurbanchildinstitute.org](http://www.theurbanchildinstitute.org) or dial 211 for the Public Library and Information Center.*