



The Montessori Approach to Sharing

The Misguided Approach

Oftentimes, a child will be using something when another child approaches, wanting a turn. The misinformed adult might tell the child: "You need to share with your friend. I will count to ten and then he can take a turn." While sharing is a lovely skill, and one that we frequently modeled, this approach is misguided. In this situation, the adult is doing the sharing, not the child. Even worse, one child's concentration and joy in work is interrupted while the other child learns that he can have what he wants, when he wants it, with no regard for anyone else. When put in the context of adult life, this scenario seems even more ridiculous. One cannot simply take their friend's car or bag just because they like it better than their own. Children who are taught to "share" through this approach often develop negative, fear-based behaviors such as hoarding toys, biting, and avoiding interacting with other children.

The Montessori Approach

In our approach we teach children to take turns. There is only one of each item in the Montessori environment. Thus, children learn valuable skills such as waiting patiently to use something or finding an alternate activity when the material they would like to use is not available. When a child chooses an activity, he is free to use it for as long as he likes, until he is finished.

Children learn to ask: "When you are finished, may I have a turn?" Genuine sharing is modeled by adults and celebrated when freely expressed by the child. Having experienced the disappointment of having to wait, children naturally develop empathy. We witness beautiful, sincere moments of true sharing every day. Children are naturally empathetic, kind beings, and often will give up a bicycle or let a friend take the first turn getting snacks with no prompting from the adult. Other times the child might invite a friend to work alongside him. These genuine expressions of generosity are much more meaningful than an adult forcing a child to share.