

# Skill-Building Opportunities

## Playing with Others

**Question:** My three-year-old daughter is our only child. I try to provide lots of opportunities for her to play with other children, but she sometimes struggles with knowing how to play with others. How can I help her?

Sure, if only we could spend our lives playing alone with toys in the attic, all would be peaceful. But we can't. And come on, life is richer with friends and colleagues. Let's start here: knowing how play with others involves understanding what others think and feel. When a child can understand and empathize with other children, she can read their cues and clues and get along with them much more effectively. This is the life skill of Perspective Taking.

There are many ways you can help her learn to read cues, whether she's in a preschool program, on play dates or with family members.

Studies have found that young children who learn Perspective Taking make a better adjustment to kindergarten as it helps them understand what their teachers and other children want and expect. You already provide opportunities for your child to play with others, which is so important! Now, use these times to promote the skill of Perspective Taking with your child.

**Perspective Taking** goes far beyond empathy; it involves learning what others think and feel, and forms the basis for children's understanding of the intentions of parents, teachers and friends. Children who can take others' perspectives are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.

1

### Talk about your feelings, your child's feelings and the feelings of others.

Share your own feelings in certain situations. Help your child create a vocabulary of "feelings" words to label her own experiences. For example, you could say:

- "I'm feeling pretty grumpy right now after being stuck in traffic. I just need a couple of minutes to relax before I'm ready to play with you." Make sure to let her know she's not to blame for your feelings.
- "You seem frustrated that you can't find where that puzzle piece fits."

2

### Use everyday moments to talk about other people's perspectives.

Perspective Taking involves developing the self control to put aside one's own thoughts and feelings in order to understand the viewpoints of others. In everyday situations, talk with your child about how other people might be feeling or thinking and why. For example, you could say,

- "Your baby cousin doesn't understand that this toy is yours. She just sees something

For more ways to help your child learn and develop, visit [mindinthemaking.org](http://mindinthemaking.org) and [vroom.org](http://vroom.org)

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colorful and interesting and wants to explore it.”

- “He didn’t like it when you grabbed his banana. It made him feel angry.”

Make sure to let your child know that she is not to blame for your feelings.

Children are often their “best selves” when they feel understood by others. But, as we promote Perspective Taking in our children, we have to practice it. You can model this life skill by putting yourself in your child’s place and trying to understand what the world looks and feels like to her. Children who feel known and understood are likely to have an easier time connecting with others.

The American Academy of Pediatrics also recommends encouraging interactive play between your child and other children and helping your child understand the importance of taking turns. Some ways to do this might be during pretend play with your child or when playing games.

### 3

#### **Pretend with your child.**

During pretend play, use words and actions to act out and talk about how your characters are feeling, what they’re thinking and why. When your child pretends to be someone else, she is practicing the life skill of Perspective Taking in a way that is fun and comfortable.

### 4

#### **Talk about the characters in books and stories.**

When reading books or telling stories with your child, ask her about what the characters might be thinking and feeling in the story and why. You can say things like:

- “Why do you think the boy is crying?”
- “What could his friend do to help him feel better?”
- “What do you do when you feel sad?”