



Some Thoughts on Sharing

In many traditional schools, the concept of "sharing" is often misunderstood and enforced in ways that can be counterproductive. For example, if one child is playing with a toy and another approaches wanting a turn, an adult might say, "You need to share with your friend. I'll count to ten, and then it's their turn." While the intention is positive, this approach misses the mark.

At its core, this method of "sharing" doesn't teach children how to share in a meaningful way—it teaches them that sharing is something they are made to do, often against their will. In this scenario, the adult is doing the sharing, not the child. Even more problematic, it disrupts the first child's concentration and enjoyment of the activity. Meanwhile, the child waiting for a turn learns that they can get what they want simply by waiting for a countdown—without any regard for the other child's experience.

If we think about this situation from an adult perspective, it becomes clear why this approach doesn't work: imagine if someone simply took your personal belongings—your car or sweater—just because they wanted them, without considering your feelings or needs. It's easy to see how this could lead to negative behaviors such as hoarding, aggression, or social avoidance.

Our Approach: Turn-Taking and Respect for Others

In a Montessori approach, we believe in teaching children how to take turns, not just to share. Our classrooms often have only one of each material, which creates opportunities for children to practice patience, waiting, and empathy. When a child chooses an activity, they are free to work with it for as long as they wish, until they feel complete. This teaches children the value of focus and concentration without the pressure of being interrupted. When another child wants to use the same material, they learn to ask politely, "When you are finished, may I have a turn?" Instead of being forced into sharing, children learn the natural rhythm of taking turns—waiting their turn when needed, and enjoying their time with the material without feeling rushed.

The Power of Genuine Sharing

In the Montessori environment, genuine sharing is something that is naturally modeled by adults and celebrated when it comes from the child. After experiencing the disappointment of having to wait, young children naturally develop empathy. They understand what it feels like to wait their turn and, as a result, they often share spontaneously. We see beautiful moments of genuine generosity every day: children will offer to share a toy, invite a friend to work alongside them, or even let a peer take the first turn at snack time—without any prompting from an adult.

These moments of real sharing are far more meaningful than any forced interaction. When children decide to share because they understand the concept of giving, it comes from a place of kindness and empathy, not obligation or fear of punishment. This process fosters true social-emotional growth, as children learn to navigate relationships with respect and care for others.

Building Empathy Through Patience

Through the Montessori approach, children not only learn to take turns but also develop important social skills like patience, empathy, and respect for others. By experiencing both the joy of uninterrupted work and the natural frustration of waiting, children learn to be considerate of their peers' feelings. Over time, these lessons help children internalize positive behaviors and develop a sense of community where mutual respect and genuine sharing thrive.

In conclusion, teaching children to take turns, rather than simply sharing on demand, helps them understand the value of respecting others' needs and feelings. Through this process, they develop the empathy and social skills necessary for meaningful relationships—skills that will benefit them well beyond the classroom.