



Fun Activities for Teaching Cooperation

Learning to play and work with peers and adults is a critical skill for developing friendships, completing group projects, and participating in extra-curricular activities. Cooperation skills also build the foundation for more complex social skills. This article includes a variety of activities for teaching cooperation at home, at school, and in the community.

Create Roles – Teach children about cooperation through group activities that require skills such as waiting, turn taking, and following directions. Below are few fun ideas.

- **Cooking** – Small group cooking activities are a fun way to divide work and practice skills. Have a written or pictorial recipe with ingredients and steps presented in order. Assign roles to each child such as measuring the flour, counting the correct number of eggs, pouring the milk, greasing the pan, and stirring. Children have to wait their turn, follow directions, and share responsibility for creating something they can enjoy later.
- **Gardening** – Whether potting seeds or planting flowers, children can have individual responsibilities such as digging holes, counting seeds, putting seeds in the holes, patting dirt over the seeds, and watering. Gardening also provides the opportunity for continued cooperation and responsibility. For example, assign children days of the week to water plants or weed the garden.
- **Art** – Group art projects such as murals and collages provide an opportunity for dividing work and creating a lasting reminder of cooperation. Select a theme and have children individually look for specific pictures in magazines for the larger project. For example, if the goal is to create a community scene, assign roles such as drawing streets, cutting out pictures of buildings, locating pictures of community helpers, and drawing trees.
- **Literacy** – Paired or small group writing assignments require children to share ideas and work together. Set guidelines about each child's specific role so they divide the task rather than having one child complete the majority of it.

Role Play – Role play situations that require cooperation and have children discuss good choices. Some role plays include: Discussing how to decorate a playhouse with a friend; Addressing a conflict during a team sport; Problem solving how to hang a large poster; Reenacting and discussing alternative responses to a difficult situation that occurred in the home or classroom.

Provide Opportunities to Practice – After children develop basic cooperation skills, give them opportunities to use these skills on their own. Encourage them to use the strategies practiced and to seek help only when they are unable to resolve the situation on their own.

- **Chores** - Have siblings sort the laundry into lights and darks. In this exercise, children will have to select items and discuss options (e.g. Light gray goes in what pile?). Another idea is to ask children to help put the groceries away. Children will have to take turns selecting items and create a plan (e.g. one person finds all the freezer items and hands them to the other person).
- **Art** - Give each child a piece of butcher paper and have them trace each other. This project promotes problem solving and cooperation by deciding who traces first, what colors to use for tracing, and the best tracing strategy.
- **Games** – Many games naturally lend themselves to determining teams, resolving conflicts, and cooperating. Encourage children to play games and discuss issues outside of adult-guided team sports. A scavenger hunt is a fun activity that requires collaboration and problem solving. Board and card games often can be made into team games which foster cooperation and team strategies. For example, playing memory in pairs is a way for children to work together and strategize.

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