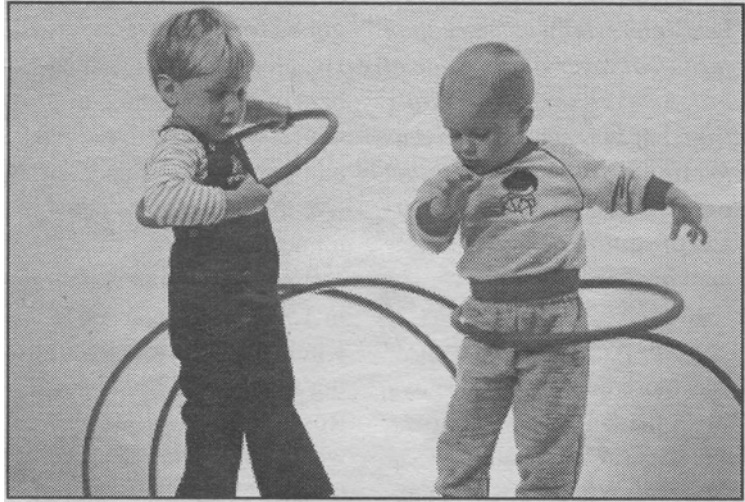


## Teaching Kids to Share

By VALERIE L. POULIN

My neighbour's four-year-old has a habit of grabbing my son's toys from him and saying things like "To bad you can't swing with me," or "when I get out my pool, you can't play in it because there's only



room for three," indicating that my son is not welcome to join her and two other neighbourhood playmates. Like many parents, I do not want my child to be treated like an outsider, or to be bullied, so as the remarks and actions became increasingly bothersome I needed help teaching my son communicate his feelings (he spoke few words at the time), rather than whining or crying and I needed to know when to step in and when to back off.

### ***So how does a parent know when to step in and when to allow their child to resolve the issue themselves?***

Nancy Eickmeier, E.C.E., who operates two Helping Hands Day Care facilities in Pickering and Ajax, says that the solution depends on the age of the children involved. The parent, or caregiver must consider the age of the children involved, then provide age-appropriate solutions.

For an older child, the best approach is to casually remind the child that the behaviour is inappropriate. For example, if an older child grabs toys from a younger one, a lesson in sharing is best. If the older child is simply playing with the younger child's toys who becomes possessive, a

sharing demonstration aimed at the younger child is in order.

If a tussle results, explain that there are "house rules" and that everyone is expected to follow them if they wish to play at your house.

### ***Know where to draw the line***

Although some parents are intent of fixing the problem, perhaps the child does not perceive the situation to be problematic. Though we can help to solve the problem, or intervene before actions become hurtful, but often it is best to let the children settle the issue themselves. But, know where to draw the line. If, in the teasing and taunting, or bossiness, there is a meanness hidden behind the comment then it's time to step in. The same action applies if a child feels intimidated, or if a child is deliberately trying to upset another child. It is best to stick to a moderate resolution such as sending a message in the form of a gentle reminder. Again, the message is that excluding someone from play or hoarding toys is unacceptable behaviour.

Anthony E. Wolf, Ph.D. and author of *It's Not Fair, Jeremy Spencer's Parents Let Him Stay Up All Night*, describes aggressive behaviour as "not always as bad as it seems." Forceful action, he says (aggression not violence), in children is normal and directed productively, it is necessary to achieving what one wants. Aggressive behaviour is a necessary part of our psychological make up. He cites examples of

parallels such as how the grabbing of a toy is correlative to the solving of a frustrating math problem.

Dr. Wolf also suggests that parents do not intervene until there is threat of serious harm.

### ***The child may be acting out of jealousy***

Sometimes changes at home are the root of the aggressive behaviour and the child feels a need to control the situation. This usually appears in the form of bossiness. In *View From the Cradle*, child psychologist Otto Weininger characterizes the jealousy of a young boy who entered nursery school around the same time as a baby sister appeared on the scene. In explaining this emotion, whose roots are in envy, Weininger says, "... is a fear that the baby will lose not only what it has, but what is meant for it."

He points out that "Jealousy is also expressed by failure, withdrawal, aggression and assaultive behaviours. . . "and that children who want "more than their share" will greedily snatch and grab toys for themselves. Maintaining a neutral tone while explaining to the child that their behaviour is unacceptable will diffuse the situation.

An article written by Patricia McCormick in *Parents* magazine, suggests helping the victims of grabbers by staying nearby and helping to get the negotiations started by helping the grabber communicate his/her feelings, and helping to assert him/herself.

Parents want their children to stand up for themselves and sometimes that means allowing them to work out problems for themselves.

I witnessed another exchange between my son and his playmate – she was trying to retain control of shared toy through intimidation. I watched to ensure that the takeover did not escalate to violent behaviour, allowing the kids to work it out for themselves, and felt a sense of pride in my son's assertiveness when he stood his ground.