

How to Help Your Child Recognize and Understand Jealousy

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"It's not fair!" Jealousy is a normal emotion experienced by adults and children. Young children often do not have the skills or language to deal with this complex feeling. Many children deal with jealousy using challenging behaviors such as tantrums, crying or hitting. Because your child may act out with anger, it can be difficult to respond to the true feeling of jealousy. When you show your child how to identify and respond to the true feelings of jealousy, you will do more than make them feel better. You will help them learn to manage painful feelings and get along with others today and in the future. If your child knows that their feelings are normal and they are unique and valued for who they are—regardless of their toys or abilities—jealous feelings are less likely to escalate into destructive or inappropriate behavior.

Suggestions for Families

Notice and name your child's feelings of jealousy. "I can see it makes you jealous when I feed the baby. When the timer is up, you can choose an activity for just you and me! I love spending time with you."

Be sure to spend dedicated, quality time with your child. Fifteen minutes of one-on-one time without the TV, computer or phone will help you build a positive relationship, support his social and emotional development, and help them feel loved, competent and confident. Quality time can be reading a book, giving hugs and/or high fives, singing a song or letting your child be your special helper.

Remember a time when you felt jealous and share it with your child. Discuss with them how you dealt with your feelings of jealousy.

Acknowledge differences in people. Teach them that everyone is unique and has different strengths and struggles. For example, you could say, "Your daddy is really good at playing baseball. I really like to play but it is hard for me." Or, "I see that some of those kids love playing with puzzles—others would rather play with the trains."

Focus on your child's strengths. Tell your child the special things about them. "When you smile at the people in the store, I can tell it makes them feel happy." Or, "I so enjoy watching you build with blocks. You work very hard on your towers and tunnels."

Read books about jealousy and other emotions. Talk with your child about what the character is feeling and experiencing and discuss with your child ideas for strategies that the character might try. For more information about emotional vocabulary, visit challengingbehavior.org and type in the search box in the upper right-hand corner, "How to Help Your Child Understand and Label Emotions."

Suggestions for Educators

Educators talk about and celebrate all kinds of differences. When children learn that our differences make us unique, they are less likely to feel jealous or compare themselves to other children and are more likely to feel proud of who they are. Educators help children learn about diversity by reading stories, looking at pictures, or playing with toys that represent people from other countries or people with different abilities, beliefs or lifestyles.

The Bottom Line

When your child can understand and label his different feelings (sad, angry, jealous) it helps them to cope with the emotion, understand others, and reduce challenging behaviors. It is natural for them to feel jealous from time to time. Children can become jealous of a parent's attention (e.g., new baby at home) or another child's toys or abilities. Showing your child how to cope with jealous feelings will provide your child with a lifelong skill.



More resources can be found at:
<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/>

