

How can parents deal with a more self-centered child?



Source: Registered Clinical Psychologist, Yiu Fong Lee

Many parents find that their children can be quite self-centered. When playing games or interacting with a group, they always want others to follow their rules. For example, a 5-year-old girl insists on playing with building blocks while her friend wants to play with cars. In such a situation, what should parents do? If the child becomes unhappy and self-centered, she may throw a tantrum and refuse to play with others. People may perceive this child as stubborn or temperamental. Here are a few methods that parents can consider to deal with their self-centered child.

First, it's important to acknowledge the child's emotions. Parents can approach the child and say, "Yes, I understand that you are feeling angry and unhappy right now because you really want to play with building blocks, but the other children don't want to. Does it make you feel upset that you can't play with the building blocks?" At this moment, parents can try patting or hugging the child, providing a sense of affirmation and closeness, allowing the child's emotions to gradually calm down. When the child appears calmer, it's an opportunity to help her move on to the next step.

The second step is called perspective-taking or putting oneself in others' shoes. Encourage the child to imagine how the other person feels by entering their world or role. Parents can engage in role-playing with the child. For example, if the girl was A and the other child was B, the girl can now pretend to be B, and the parent can pretend to be A. The parent can imitate her tone and say, "I don't want to play! I don't like playing with cars! I must play with building blocks!" Then, the parent can ask the child, "How does that make you feel?" The child usually responds with, "He always insists on playing his way, and I don't want to play with him. I feel unhappy."



Parents can also ask the child, "If that's the case, do you still want to play with this child and spend time together in the future?" The girl might respond, "I don't really want to. If that's the case, I'll have to play alone by myself, and it's boring." Children usually want someone to play with.

Moving on to the third step, learning problem-solving. Parents can brainstorm ideas with the child, such as trying a game of rock-paper-scissors with the other child. It could be agreed that this time the winner gets to decide, and next time it could be the loser's turn. Alternatively, we can switch and combine different ideas creatively. For example, in the case of playing with building blocks, can we play with both the building blocks and the cars? We can build a parking lot with the blocks and then let the cars drive on them. This way, we can play together.



We help the child come up with different types of solutions, but the most important thing is for them to understand how their behavior affects and impacts others, and how they can change their behavior so that others would be more willing to play with them. This is known as prosocial behavior.