

# Responding to “it’s not fair!”

“She got a bigger cookie than me!”

“We always get to do what he wants!”

“All my friends get to stay up later than me!”

“It’s not fair!”

Children are very aware of what’s “fair.” However, this sense of fairness is based solely on their own wants and needs. When a child sees someone else getting some sort of advantage that they do not have, they feel it is only fair that they receive the same.

It is not uncommon for a child to be perfectly happy with what they have, until they learn that someone else has more, bigger or better. Then, suddenly, it’s no longer fair.

What the child does not yet understand is that fair does

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## PARENTING POINTS

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not mean equal. Fair is about everyone getting what they need.

Parents can unintentionally send messages that reinforce a child’s belief that fair is the same as equal. For example, if one child needs a new pair of shoes, it may seem harmless to pick up something for the sibling as well, so that each one has something new. But in reality, one child needs shoes today, and the other will most certainly need new

shoes in the near future. It is fair that each child get what they need when they need it, not that everyone gets something from every shopping trip.

When your child is frustrated and believes they are being treated unfairly, it can be helpful to simply let them know that you understand. “You’re upset because you really wanted to go first and your sibling got the first turn this time.” You don’t need to bring up all the other times when they went first. If you acknowledge how they feel, they can see that it’s OK to have those feelings, even if it does not change the outcome.

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