

COOPERATIVE PLAY

What Is This Developmental Skill?

Cooperative play involves playing with others toward a shared purpose. Children create games, build together, assign roles, follow rules, and solve problems as a group. This requires communication, turn-taking, flexibility, emotional regulation, and perspective taking.

How Does This Normally Develop?

Cooperative play becomes more common during the preschool and early school years. Children gradually learn to share ideas, negotiate roles, follow group expectations, and recover from disagreements. These abilities develop through repeated social experiences and adult guidance.

How Can Neglect Interfere with Its Development?

Neglect can affect trust, regulation, language, and social understanding. A child may feel unsafe giving up control or may expect rejection from peers. Limited social opportunities can also delay skills such as sharing, waiting, compromising, and repairing conflict.

What Might This Look Like?

A child may avoid peers, control the game, argue over rules, struggle to take turns, or leave when conflict occurs. Some children become aggressive or rigid, while others remain on the edge of group activities without joining.

Parenting Implications

Begin with short play opportunities involving one or two children. Prepare the child for expectations and coach language for sharing, waiting, and problem-solving. Help children work through manageable conflicts rather than immediately ending the activity.

From Understanding to Attunement

A child who struggles with peers may not lack interest in friendship. Cooperative play depends on many skills that may still be developing. Children need support, practice, and help repairing relationships.