



Prosocial Behavior: What to Expect

Prosocial behavior is an action that benefits another person or animal. Altruism refers to unselfish, benevolent behavior. True altruism means that the person shares, helps, or cooperates with no thought about what is in it for him. Prosocial behaviors are intended to meet someone’s needs, either physical, psychological/emotional, or both. Sarah’s mother demonstrated compassion toward the family’s cat. She modeled how to meet a creature’s physical and emotional needs.

EXAMPLE Sarah’s mother attended to the cat’s injured foot and cradled the cat, calming her down and telling her that she would be okay.

Forms of Prosocial Behavior There are three major categories of prosocial behavior: sharing, helping, and cooperation (see Figure 3.4).

- **Sharing** refers to dividing, giving, or bestowing. A person owns something, or at least currently has possession of it, and decides to let somebody use the item or even gives ownership of the item to another person. People can share or donate materials, information or time, as shown in Figure 3.4. Young children do share things with others. On some occasions, they share altruistically, such as moving over to make room at the lunchroom table, simply because they recognize that another person or animal needs something.

On other occasions, children share something to initiate social contact, then keep the interaction going once it has started. Children might occasionally share as a way of meeting their own need for contact with others. Young children’s sharing often takes the form of simply offering objects to other children or adults during social interaction (Eisenberg, Wolchik, Goldberg, & Engel, 1992).

EXAMPLE Patrick asked Vinnie to join him in play on the playground like this: “I have a hoop, Vinnie. You can roll it and jump through it. Wanna try?” He offered something to initiate an interaction.

Whatever a young child’s reason for sharing, he is usually not highly self-sacrificing; that is, he takes little risk. There is little risk in sharing extra mittens, for example, or sharing information on how to do something.

We see sharing, helping, and cooperation frequently in young children, even in children who are aggressive. Teachers need to notice and encourage such behavior in *all* children, including those with different levels of aggression. Unfortunately, some preschool teachers do not pay attention to positive behaviors such as sharing or helping in aggressive preschoolers, even if the aggression is mild (McComas, Johnson, & Symons, 2005). In this study, other

Prosocial behavior

Actions, such as sharing, helping, or cooperating, that promote the well-being of others

Sharing

Giving, donating; one type of prosocial behavior

FIGURE 3.4 Prosocial behavior

