

Helping

Assisting, performing acts of kindness, rescuing; one type of prosocial behavior

Cooperating

Working collaboratively to complete a job or task; one type of prosocial behavior

children in the class paid positive attention to helping and sharing from their aggressive peers, but the teachers did not. Encouraging prosocial behavior is a good way to *decrease* aggressive behavior; therefore, a teacher who ignores a child who shares or helps misses an opportunity to support that child.

- **Helping** involves performing simple everyday acts of kindness and rescue. It also includes defending others, as when a bystander in a bullying incident intervenes and helps the victim. Helping also includes removing the cause of someone's distress, as when Sean's Dad removed a splinter from Sean's foot.

All children are capable of sharing and helping, but a variety of factors influence their actual level of prosocial behavior. For example, a child might also share or help more easily if important adults have modeled the behaviors.

EXAMPLE Thomas's father *helped* a neighbor fix the neighbor's gate. Thomas watched as his dad *shared* his tools.

- **Cooperating** refers to working together willingly to accomplish a job or task. The motive for working together is altruistic.

EXAMPLE Pippin, Tom, and Janet cooperated to clean the gerbil's house. Pippin cleaned and filled the food and water dishes, while Tom and Janet washed the inside of the house. Then, they all checked off completion of this task.

Many children play cooperatively (Anderson, Hilton, & Wouden-Miller, 2003; Parten, 1932) and this social interaction seems to be critical in helping young children gain important knowledge that enhances their social and cognitive development (Ramani & Brownell, 2014). In cooperative play, children follow one another around and make mutual suggestions about what to do next. Such budding interest in others and in playing and working cooperatively is prosocial behavior when the cooperation benefits someone or a group, as Pippin, Tom, and Janet's cleaning the gerbil house did.

Children Need Specific Competencies to Act Compassionately Sharing or helping seems like such a simple thing. However, several events must occur during a child's first several years of life before he becomes capable of compassion and generosity. Most significantly, he needs to be securely attached to his parents, which boosts compassion as a child grows older (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005). He also needs a very specific set of competencies: cognitive and emotional. In addition, he needs specific skills. A child can show compassion only when he has all three abilities (see Figure 3.5). Having one or two of these abilities is not enough.

Cognitive Competencies Children need specific cognitive competencies before they can share, help, or cooperate.

- **Sense of self.** A child needs to know that she is an individual and separate from other individuals. This occurs in infancy.
- **Identify needs.** The child must be able to recognize what somebody needs, such as sharing space on the carpet at circle time.
- **Make things happen.** A child must be able to see himself as a person who can make things happen (for example, “I can help John by sharing a little of my lunch money with him”). This ability arises in infancy and continues to develop throughout childhood.
- **Language.** Children need good enough language skills to describe how others might be feeling and to describe how they themselves feel (for example, “John lost his lunch money and needs to eat”).
- **Memory.** A child must be able to hold in his mind what another person or animal needs before he can act on it.