



## What to Say When Your Child Says, “That’s Not Fair!”



If I had a nickel for every time I heard, “That’s Not Fair!” I would be rich. When one gets a bigger scoop of ice cream (or cookie or whatever), rest assured the others will notice and bring it to your attention. (Aren’t they thoughtful?!) What’s a parent to do?

**Kids think *fair* means *equal*.** *She has more Cheetos; I want more too.* So you find yourself counting Cheetos. Betsy Braun, child development specialist, says that when a child screams, “That’s not fair” what she really means is, “I want whatever he has. I’m not happy with what just happened.” We hate to see our child unhappy, so we try to rearrange every situation to make everything equal (and completely wear ourselves out)!

***Fair* should mean *just* (not equal).** Braun says that *just* means that we consider all sides of the issue and do what is right at that time. One child may need new shoes (because his feet have grown), so it is fair for him to get new shoes. When it is necessary, the other sibling will get new shoes. This is hard for kids to swallow, but we are not helping develop character by caving in to their whining. What doesn’t seem right (in his eyes) can still be right for that situation.

What can I say? As tempting as it is to say the famous line, “Well, buddy, life’s not fair”, don’t do it. Empathize. “I think you’re saying that you don’t like it. I know you’d like a pair of new shoes too. I understand. When your feet grow, we’ll get you a new pair.” Then move on.

At times, it’s okay to share your own disappointments and model what we want them to learn. (I’m disappointed that we didn’t get the house, but there will be other houses available.) Adults are still learning this hard lesson.

The good news is that you are building their character and preparing them for life. They are learning to tolerate disappointment and build resilience. It seems hard in the short term to deny our child anything, but it is really good for them in the long term.