

## **Sibling Rivalry; Five ways to ensure you aren't adding to the problem**

There are many things we accidentally do as parents or teachers that encourage kids to fight. Knowing what these are helps us avoid participating in them and adding fuel to the fire. Putting these five ideas into practice will help you decrease unnecessary arguments.

**Encourage telling, discourage tattling:** Tattling is one of the most frustrating behaviours kids do. Understanding the difference between tattling and telling is an important life skill, yet many of us fail to teach it.

Our kids need to understand two simple points:

- Telling is when you are trying to get someone out of danger or trouble
- Tattling is when you are trying to get someone into trouble

Responses that encourage tattling:

“What! Lisa was told to stay inside... you tell her to come and see me right now!”

“Who made this mess? Tell me right now or no story time for anyone.”

“Bart, did you pinch Lisa? That's mean and unacceptable behaviour...”

Responses that discourage tattling:

“Are you trying to get Lisa into trouble or out of trouble?”

“This mess will need to be cleaned up before story time.”

“Lisa, do you need some ice (or a hug) for that bruise?”

“Do you need my help to tell Bart how you feel about him pinching you?”

Don't get upset with kids for tattling, they do it because it can be very rewarding. Try to focus on keeping the door to communication open (i.e. responding respectfully) while guiding them in the right direction.

**Let bygones be bygones:** Think carefully before demanding an explanation when breaking up a disagreement between your kids. We often provide much sought after attention by asking questions and, without a video, may never know the truth. It's better to calmly do what needs to be done (console a hurt child, focus on clean up, discipline the kids) and forego the investigation. You can ask questions later if you feel you must, but understand you may never know the real story.

**Stay on the fence:** It takes two to tango and even the most innocent seeming child can be the instigator. You give that child a taste of negative power when you side with him or her. Discipline them both and they'll soon learn not to involve you unless absolutely necessary (see *Five tips to decrease the fighting* for ideas). Of course when you witness the interaction and know one person is responsible, deal with it accordingly, just be careful you are not choosing favorites.

**Small reactions give bigger results:** When you must remove one it is often more effective to take the one who is hurt. Refrain from making a big deal about it or you teach the kids it pays to yell loudest. Instead, remove the hurt child with a calm

statement like, “Bart and I will work on his problem solving skills later, let’s you and I go put some ice on that bruise right now.” If neither child is hurt you might ask, “Can you two work this out or do you need me involved?”

**Let them think:** When we ask kids to come up with solutions we offer an opportunity to learn. Unfortunately it’s often easier to tell them what to do instead. Many kids would prefer we do all the work...but then what are they learning? The more work they do, the less likely they are to slip back into fighting mode the next time.

Two examples of ways to keep the kids thinking are: “Bart, can you think of an acceptable way to work out this disagreement with your sister?” or “It sounds like you two might need a cooling off period before you can play together nicely, do you need my help setting that up?”

Using the above ideas won’t stop kids from disagreeing, but it will provide them with an understanding of how much you are willing to be involved in their squabbles. It also allows them an opportunity to practice skills that will be important in every relationship they have.

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