

# Stop Sibling Conflict

Part of the [Sibling Rivalry Series](#)



Tatiana Gladskikh/iStock/Thinkstock

We as parents can help ward off sibling conflict. Focusing on the positive in each of our kids, not comparing them, and helping them develop skills at which they can be "the best" are just three ways.

But there will still be times when our kids will decide that the smell of a good fight is just too intoxicating to pass up. It is in that arena that we must act as referees. We may have to simply separate them and send them to separate corners. But how can we keep them out of the ring?

## **Help Your Kids Develop Friendships With Each Other**

Since it's more satisfying to throw a punch at an enemy than a friend, try to strengthen the friendships between your kids. Sometimes at dinner, we'll go around the table and say one positive thing about each family member—something we've noticed about him or her that is particularly attractive, maybe a strength or a gift. The idea is to take the time to intentionally build one another up in love.

You can also teach your kids to demonstrate their love for their siblings by praying for them. If I'm putting Clancy to bed, and Tucker's been a real bother of a brother all day, I'll say, "Why don't you pray for Tucker tonight? He had a really hard day." Prayer keeps things in perspective and fosters love for the other person.

At the same time, look for opportunities in which your children can serve each other. For example, if I'm busy and I notice one of my kids is struggling to do something or is calling for me, I may suggest, "Haven, can you go help your little sister?" Afterward I'll affirm her, letting her know what a sweet big sister she is.

You can also encourage loving relationships between your kids by helping them to focus on the long-term. Tell your children about one of the best friends you had as a child, and describe all the fun things you did together. Then tell them how long it's been since you've seen or talked to that friend. Point out to them that friends are great, but family is forever.

Ask your kids this: Would you rather invest all your energy in watering and tending a flower that, while beautiful, lasts only a season? Or would you want to spend more of your time cultivating a tree that will grow throughout your entire life, one that can bring you joy during your childhood and shade in your old age?

## **Strategies to Defuse Sibling Conflict**

In this "Toolbox" section, I've come up with several strategies to foster healthy, happy sibling relationships. By working with our kids, we can help keep sibling conflict from escalating into nuclear war-and keep peace on the family horizon.

- I've noticed a couple of tiny "mommies" and a diminutive "daddy" running around our house. They show up long enough to reprimand the others about behavior that is not permissible. But they tend to speak in

rather sharp tones. Sometimes I'll say to a miniature parent: "Are you Haven's mommy? You're sounding like you are, so would you please prepare her lunch today?" (You can, of course, substitute any chore that you as the mom or dad would normally do.)

- When my children were little and Tucker would take one of Haven's toys without asking, I would allow Haven to go into Tucker's bedroom and pick out any toy she wanted to play with for the day.
- If one of my girls breaks the other's toy, the other girl is allowed to choose any of her sister's toys to replace the broken one.
- Things got so crazy one day with fighting at our house that I made the kids go a whole day without the benefit of one another's company. The next morning, from the moment they woke up, they weren't allowed to talk, eat, or play with each other or have school in the same room. By the next day, they were so desperate to be together that they called a truce.
- If your children get into a high-decibel argument, transfer it to the backyard. Make each child stand at opposite ends of the yard. Then have them yell, "I love you!" back and forth 20 times. This releases some of the pent-up anger, and it's a lot better than some of the other words they maybe tempted to yell. After this, allow them to continue the argument, if they choose, but with no more yelling. Nine times out of 10, all the energy is diffused and the disagreement is forgotten.
- Isn't it amazing how two children can tell entirely different stories about the same event? When this happens, I restrict them to the same room until they can come up with one version of the story. This forces them to think about the events that actually occurred, and each child is motivated to confess her "sin" in order to be released from the deliberation room.
- If you overhear your children arguing, step close enough to let them know you're listening. Say that you will give them a few more minutes to work it out on their own. If they aren't able to do this, however, you will work the problem out for them, and it probably won't be fun for either

child.

- If your kids are quarreling, say loudly enough for them to hear, "I hope I'm not hearing bickering and fussing." This should stop them immediately, since they know your theory: Children fuss because they don't have enough to do; fighting children should be put to work!
- I issue a \$1 fine to an older sibling who is tormenting or playing too roughly with a younger one. What really makes this hurt is that I make him or her pay the fine to the younger sibling, not to me.
- It is my responsibility to create a peaceful environment for my family; I don't like having conflict in the house. If my kids are bickering, I'll often explain this to my children. If they are unable to cooperate with one another, they must play in the backyard, whether it's 30 degrees or 100 degrees outside. Of course, on those kinds of days, they seem to be able to work things out more quickly.
- Do you ever feel as if you are scolding your children all day long for bickering? Wouldn't you rather sing their praises all day? Try this. Instead of reprimanding the one who's causing the strife, encourage the child or children who are playing without arguing. Children enjoy being noticed and singled out for good behavior. Perhaps the reward of Mother's praise will be enough to keep the peace.