

Sibling Rivalry - Cut it Out!

Do you look for the culprit when your kids fight? Do you take sides? If you do you really need to Cut it Out. Sibling Rivalry is one of the most frustrating behaviors that parents have to deal with. "Nothing works!" parents complain. There are many complex reasons that siblings argue: They don't have complicated negotiation skills in place which require a sense of one's own feelings and an understanding of the other's. An older child doesn't *get* the limitations of his younger sibling. A younger child can't understand spatial and physical boundaries and will hit when they are angry and get into things they shouldn't (including her brother's stuff). To top it all off, kids will act out stress and tension and will mimic the behavior of a frustrated, frazzled parent! And, let's not forget that picking on your brother or sister is a great pastime when you are bored.

If you have two children under five you will have to supervise their play and listen for times when their frustrations start to percolate. Step in early, distract, redirect and connect for a moment to identify their needs. This can ward off flying fire trucks and coco bonks on the head.

Set limits on aggressive behavior but be careful not to overuse time out for young kids or you may never seem them. If there is aggression have the child sit for a moment, say firmly "It isn't okay to

hit (or bite, scratch, spit). We need to play gently. (ask before taking, wait our turn...)

Forced apologies teach children to lie and think that, "sorry" is a quick escape from responsibility. Better to mirror each child's feelings and help them understand the emotions. Use your communication skills because that is how kids will learn to, "Use their words." You can only be effective when you are feeling calm so check your own emotions first.

Some sibling rivalry can be ignored. Kids love to rope parents in with this wonderful negative attention getting behavior. Breathe, grab some headphones and find your happy place...in through the nose...out through the mouth.

Teach that you won't respond to tattling that gets a sibling into trouble, "Mom, Bobby told me to shut-up!" only tattling that gets him out of trouble, "Mom, Bobby is hanging at the top of the tree with the skinny branches."

So stand back, stay neutral, assess the squabbles but don't take sides. Help each child find their voice by understanding their hearts. Spend time with each child on their own and they may very well have a few loving moments together. But don't get too excited, remember Cain and Able?

Do's and Don'ts for Sibling Rivalry

- Do:**
- Mirror each child's feelings without taking sides
 - Give empathy without taking over
 - Identify the problem and invite them to problem solve
 - Teach skills when you feel calm
 - Ignore squabbles that don't lead to physical violence
 - Spend one on one time with each child
 - Set limits on aggressive behavior with cool down times
 - Support boundaries around things, bodies and space
- Don't**
- Force apologies
 - Reward tattling
 - Take sides
 - Step in when you are upset
 - Make kids share their things
 - Expect kids to be "nice" and guilt trip