

Top 10 Ways to Keep Your Kids from Fighting

Fighting among siblings is as natural as the changing of the seasons. And contrary to what many parents believe, sibling rivalry is a sign of mental health in a family! While there may be times when it's difficult to deal with, there are some simple things you can do to limit fighting and make it tolerable:

- 1. Ignore their fighting**—Fighting is often a way for kids to get you to notice them. If you ignore their fighting (unless weapons are involved), there will be less incentive for them to do it.
- 2. Treat your kids the same when it comes to fighting**—If you get into who started things, you may be training your kids to be victims and bullies. Put them in the same boat and don't take sides.
- 3. Give your kids Positive Reinforcement when they're cooperating**—Let them know that they're doing a wonderful job when they get along. This one's easy to forget, but vitally important. Give them attention when they're behaving the way you want. Continually telling them to stop may actually be creating more fighting!
- 4. Limit your own fighting and arguing**—Having your kids see occasional arguing and "making up" from you is fine, but your kids will learn how to get along from you. Don't expect them to do it well if you don't show them how.
- 5. Create an Environment of Cooperation**—Do projects together as a family that involves cooperation. Talk about how important it is for the family to cooperate. Avoid games or activities that promote fighting or excessive competition in your kids.
- 6. Train your kids in peacemaking when they're away from conflict**—Talk to your kids about fighting at a time when they're relaxed and open. Ask them about what other options they might have taken rather than to hit their sister. Help them to brainstorm better solutions.
- 7. Use Consequences, not Punishment**—Punishing kids usually just creates angry kids who are more likely to fight. While some punishment may be inevitable, do your best to give consequences instead. Punishment may bring short term solutions, but will also bring long term problems.
- 8. Control how you react to their fighting**—When you must intervene, make sure you stay calm. If you're angry and shaming, you actually make it more likely that fighting will occur again.
- 9. Limit the number of fighting opportunities you give your kids**—Think about how fights can potentially start. Don't buy a red ball and a blue ball; this may easily result in a fight. When you buy two red balls - no fight. Be familiar with the times in which fighting occurs the most - when they're hungry or tired. Take precautions, like having dinner ready before the "bewitching hour" occurs.
- 10. Love your kids for all they're worth**—Every day tell them you love them, and more importantly—show them. Kids who feel emotionally connected to their parents are the least likely to fight. This won't eliminate it, but the alternative isn't pretty at all.

Source: Mark Brandenburg (www.markbrandenburg.com). 1/08

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