

Siblings Arguing

Definition

- Most siblings argue and quarrel. They verbally fight over possessions, space on the sofa, time in the bathroom, or the last donut.
- On most days, siblings are friends and companions, rather than rivals. Some friction occurs in most close relationships.
- In addition, siblings may compete for favorite position with one or both parents.
- The positive side of sibling rivalry is that it gives children a chance to learn to give and take, share, and stand up for their rights.

Health Information

Prevention

- First, help your children acknowledge their feelings. Let them know it is all right to feel angry towards a sibling. But, they are not allowed to escalate their anger to fighting or name calling. Give them other options to hurtful arguing, such as getting away from their sibling for a while.
- Second, provide access to outside friends and different activities. Do not expect your children to always play happily with each other.
- Third, do not show favoritism toward one child over another. Try to talk with each child every day and to schedule a special individual activity once a week.
- Most important, show your children how to settle disagreements peacefully and in a calm voice. Try not to be disrespectful or ill-tempered with your children or other people.

Care Advice

- 1. Encourage Children to Settle Their Own Disagreements:**
 - Clarify the Rule: "Settle your own arguments, but no hitting".
 - The more you intervene, the more you will be called upon to intervene.
 - When possible stay out of your children's disagreements as long as they remain verbal. Children can't go through life having a referee to resolve their differences. By arguing with siblings and peers, children will learn to negotiate with others and find common ground.
 - However, if your children are less than 3 years old and one of them is aggressive, you will need to supervise them closely. At this age, children do not understand the potential dangers of fighting.
- 2. If Your Children Come to You with their Argument, Try to Stay Out of the Middle:**
 - Try to keep your children from bringing their argument to you for an opinion. Remind them that they should settle it themselves.
 - If you do become involved, limit your role. Help your children clarify what they are arguing about.
 - Teach them to listen better. Encourage each child to describe the problem for a minute or two while the other child listens without interrupting. If they still don't understand the issue, try to describe it for them.
 - Unless there's an obvious culprit, do not try to decide who is to blame, who started it, or who is right. Asking them about this can be counterproductive because it may encourage them to exaggerate or lie.
 - Also, do not impose a solution. Since it's their problem, let them find their own solution whenever possible.

3. **If an Argument Becomes Too Loud, Do Something About It:**
 - If the arguing becomes annoying or interferes with your ability to think, go to your children and tell them, "I do not want to hear your arguing. Please settle your differences quietly or find another place to argue".
 - If they continue arguing loudly, send them to the basement, outdoors, or to time-out in separate rooms.
 - If arguing over a toy, make it "your toy" for the rest of the day. If arguing over the TV channel, take away TV privileges for that day. If they are arguing over who gets to sit in the front seat of the car, have them both to sit in the back seat.
4. **Do Not Permit Hitting:**
 - Clarify the Rule: "No Hitting". This also applies to other types of physical fighting.
 - Remind them that disagreements can't be settled by hitting.
 - If your children are hurting each other, send them both to time-out in separate places.
 - Try to intervene at the shoving stage.
 - Don't waste time trying to figure out who took the first swing or provoked the fighting.
 - Don't ask questions or listen to accusations, just send them to time-out.
 - Do the same if they are putting property at risk. Have another rule "No breaking things".
5. **Do Not Permit Name Calling:**
 - Clarify the Rule: "No Name Calling".
 - Do not allow name calling or mean teasing. Here are some examples: calling a child who is not good in school a "dummy", one who is not athletic "clumsy", or one who has a bed-wetting problem "smelly". Do not permit such hurtful comments because they cause emotional pain and can damage a child's self-esteem.
 - For name-calling, punishing that child alone makes sense.
6. **Stop Any Arguing that Occurs in Public Places:**
 - If you are in a shopping mall or restaurant and your children begin arguing, you need to stop them because it is annoying to other people.
 - If the arguing continues after a warning, separate them (for example, by sitting between them).
 - If that doesn't work, give them a brief time-out outside or at an out-of-the-way spot.
 - If your children are over age 4, you can warn them that they will lose a later activity, such as video time at home.
 - Sometimes you will need to leave the public setting and take your children home.
7. **Protect Each Child's Personal Possessions and Friendships:**
 - When children argue over a toy and the toy belongs to one of the children, return it to the owner. A child doesn't have to share his possessions. Warn him, however, that some time he may want to play with his sister's toy and want her to share.
 - Teach your children to take turns playing with family toys such as video games or board games.
 - Also, teach your child to share toys when friends come over. Sharing is a needed skill for making and keeping friends and getting along in school.
 - Younger siblings often intrude on older siblings' friendships and play. It is helpful if you give the younger sibling a playmate or special activity when your older child has a friend over.
8. **Give Group Consequences:**
 - All punishment for arguing or fighting must be a group consequence. Send both to their room. Cancel screen time or other privileges for both.
 - Rivalry will become intense if a parent shows favoritism. Do not take sides. Do not compare them and do not label one as the troublemaker. Do not listen to any tattling.
 - If one of your children complains that you are not being fair, restate the rule that has been broken. Also, restate the goal that they learn to get along together.
 - If you are feeling guilty, remind yourself that being a parent is difficult, but any mistakes you make will balance out.

9. **Give Group Praise:**

- Whenever you see your children playing together in a friendly way, praise them both.
- Compliment them for helping each other and settling disagreements politely.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your children fight with each other constantly
- Your children have many other behavioral problems
- One of your children constantly teases the other
- One of your children has physically injured the other
- Getting along is not improved after using this plan for 6 weeks
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

Copyright 2000-2022 Schmitt Pediatric Guidelines LLC

Disclaimer: This health information is for educational purposes only. You the reader assume full responsibility for how you choose to use it. The information contained in this handout should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Listing of any resources does not imply an endorsement.