

# Sibling Fights

## *What to do if your children fight with each other*

Brothers and sisters fight with each other. It's pretty much a fact of life. Nearly one out of three parents says their children fight often.

There are several reasons for this. First, children don't choose to live with one another. And because they live together, they are pretty comfortable with each other.

The better children know someone, the less inhibited they are about fighting with that person. Children tend to fight much more with their brothers and sisters than with other children. And children tend to fight more often with best friends than with strange children.

So if your children fight a lot with each other, it doesn't necessarily mean they don't like each other or that they will fight a lot with other children.

Parents can help brothers and sisters fight a little less often. But even with your help, your children may still quarrel and fight sometimes.

### **On Back**

**What to do about brothers and sisters who fight a lot.**

A publication of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development made possible with help from the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund For Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

For more Parenting Guides and other information, visit the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development on the Internet at [www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/familyissues/guides](http://www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/familyissues/guides)

**You & Your Child** may be reproduced for non-profit use only.



## You & Your Child



# What to do if your children fight with each other

## **Don't try to break up every fight**

Disagreement and conflict are normal. And very young children do not yet know how to solve problems with words. They only know physical methods, including pushing, taking a toy, or fighting.

The best way for young children to learn how to deal with disagreement and conflict is to work it out themselves.

If one of the children is likely to get hurt, you have to step in and break it up. Otherwise, let the children work it out.

## **Set house rules about fighting**

Limit fighting by setting rules. For example, the rules might be, “no screaming, no throwing things, and no hitting.” If these happen, you will punish both children, and let them know what the punishment will be.

## **Don't ask, “Who started it?”**

It really doesn't matter who started the fight. Most of the time, each child will blame the other.

Punish both children equally.

If no fighting is a rule, punish both children equally when it is broken.

It may be difficult to punish older and younger children the same way. But both should face the consequences of fighting.

## **Give young children a time out**

Spanking a child for hitting another child sends the confusing message that you can hit someone but he or she cannot.

Try giving children a “time out” instead. Place each in a separate place. Don't allow them to talk or move around for 3 to 5 minutes.

## **Take away privileges for older children**

For children 6 years old or older, try punishing them for fighting by taking away some privileges, especially if they fight a lot.

Restrict television time, playing of music, or other activities they enjoy.

You can also give them some extra work to do around the house as punishment.

## **Teach your children how to solve disputes**

After you break up a fight and your children are finished being punished, help them understand how to solve their problems peacefully.

If the fight was over a toy, have the children share or take turns. If the fight started over one child getting more juice than the other, have one child pour juice into two glasses and have the other child pick the glass he or she wants.

Have older children talk about ways to settle their problems. Ask them to tell you what is good and what is bad about each method. Try to get them both to agree on a way to solve a dispute.

## **When your children aren't fighting, praise them**

Try to “catch” your children solving problems peacefully and praise them for it.

Look for times when they share, take turns, or compromise. For example, say to them, “I like how you took turns on the bike and solved that problem.”

## **Maintain a peaceful household**

Discuss problems and compromise. Be aware of good behavior and show appreciation. Children learn more from imitation than rewards of punishment.

