

## Sibling Conflicts

Sibling struggles are a normal part of childhood. Brothers and sisters naturally compete for the attention and the favor of the most important people in their lives - their parents. They also struggle over space, toys and each other's behavior.

The wise parent avoids getting involved unless the family rules are broken. When fighting is annoying to you, it's fine to tell the children to fight quietly or in a place away from you. Sibling arguments can get out of hand! When fighting becomes too destructive or physical, you must step in to enforce rules about no hurting, no name calling and no property damage.

If you do step into the battle, have each child take one or two minutes to describe the problem without interruptions. Encourage your children to listen to each other and if they still don't understand the issue, reframe it for them. "You're mad because you think Sam should share with you." (Remember that sharing is something we choose to do and a child should be allowed to decide about sharing.)

Resist offering your ideas about solving the problem. Children can settle differences about who started the argument, who is right, and usually can find their own solutions.

Show your children how to disagree and talk about strong feelings. "You feel very angry. Tell your brother why you feel so angry." Praise both children as they begin to talk about the problem. Time-out may be needed to stop the fighting and start the talking.

If you must problem solve, do not reward either child. Settle arguments about a toy by taking it away. End fussing over who sits in the front seat - no one rides in the front. Fight in public places are not acceptable. Stop the fighting and tell your children that their behavior is annoying everyone nearby. Be prepared to leave if they don't stop fighting.

### Pointers for Parents:

- ✓ Get involved in sibling battles only if behavior gets out of hand.
- ✓ Stop fights if hurting, name calling or destructive behavior happens.
- ✓ Protect each child's personal possessions, privacy and friendships.
- ✓ Praise cooperative behavior. Compliment them for helping each other and settling arguments appropriately.
- ✓ Sibling struggles offer chances to learn about getting along with others and learn positive ways to handle disagreements.