

Stop Sibling Squabbles

In any family where there are people, there will be occasional disagreements. But constant bickering among children can quickly drive their parents crazy. How are we to handle such conflicts and rivalry? The most effective response to sibling squabbles can be summed up in five simple words: Pray, Practice, Penalize, Prune, and Persevere.



Pray – Pray daily for a peaceful home, for a loving family, for obedient children, and for God’s wisdom in training them. Do this

even before problems arise. Then, whenever tempers do flare, pray individually with the children involved, that God will help them to put others first and to show love to one another, appealing to older children especially to exercise patience and self-control and pointing to relevant verses such as 1 John 4:20-21, Luke 6:31, Galatians 5:13, and Proverbs 6:16-19.

Practice – Once you’ve identified where the children erred in the way they were relating, ask them, “How could you have handled that situation better?” Have them run through the scenario again with the preferred responses. Depending on the ages of the children involved, you may want to practice this three or four times before moving on. “Okay, Johnnie, instead of snatching the toy away this time, ask ‘May I play, too?’” or “Janie, instead hitting your brother and screaming when he grabs your toy, can you practice sharing? Say, ‘Would you like to take a turn now?’”

Penalize – Sometimes conflict stems from immaturity and thoughtlessness, but other times it’s something else and should be dealt with accordingly. **Deliberate cruelty, belligerence, and name-calling should never be tolerated.** You love your children too much to let them grow up to be bullies; therefore, you must put a stop to that type of behavior swiftly and decisively. Clearly defined rules and consistently enforced consequences will make life at home more enjoyable for everyone in it.

Prune – Our rule has always been, “If you can’t get along with your siblings, you can’t play with your friends.” By thus “pruning” outside relationships, it allows our children to focus their attention and energy on forging friendships with their own brothers and sisters. But there are other things that get “pruned” whenever our kids have trouble getting along. Anything that seems to be the source of quarrels gets taken away, at least temporarily, including any toys that they repeatedly fight over. Cutting out excess sugar can calm children down and help them behave more civilly. And did you know that a person’s level of happiness is decreased by 5% for every hour of television he watches a day? Reasoning that the same principle may hold for viewing DVDs, surfing the Internet, or playing video games, we cut back on our already very limited use of visual media whenever our children seem irritable and impatient with one another.

Persevere – You don’t have to live with squabbling. Let your kids know that you are not going to tolerate their fighting any more, then **be consistent in dealing with it swiftly.** The nature of sibling relationships is such that the above rules will probably need to be applied repeatedly, so don’t expect to run through these steps once, never to be bothered by bickering between brothers and sisters again. Every time an argument breaks out, just rinse and repeat, and they’ll eventually catch on.

The psalmist declared, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.” (Psalm 133:1) Isn’t that the goal of parents everywhere? What methods do you use to keep the peace at your house?