

when the kids argue

Parents often worry about brothers and sisters quarrelling. A certain amount of quarrelling is normal for children in families. It is one of the ways that they learn how to get on with other people. Sometimes, however, you will need to step in when tempers become frayed and you can see that things are getting out of control.

What causes quarrelling?

Learning to get on with others

Arguments between brothers and sisters are one of the ways that children learn to respect other people's belongings and feelings and learn to solve problems. Learning to argue fairly and without hurting each other will help them get on with others.

Parents' attention

- Children in families also fight about their parents' love. To children love means time and attention. If you seem to have more time for one child than you do for another, they are likely to become jealous.



- Often an older child who feels hurt and angry will try to get at a new baby or younger child in some way. If the parents then rescue the younger child (as they may have to) and at the same time punish the older child, it makes the older child feel more unloved and misunderstood.
- This can become a habit, where one child always seems to be the one who starts the fights. The parents feel that they should rescue the child who is being picked on. This makes the one who 'started it' feel worse, and so this child will start another fight when the chance comes.

Remember, the child who seems to start the quarrel is not always the one who does so. Often one child will do something to annoy the other child knowing they will hit back and then get into trouble.

What parents can do?

Here are some steps you can take to help prevent quarrels:

- Protect the needs of each child e.g. prevent older children's activities from being interfered with by younger children and vice versa.
- Spend special time with each child on a regular basis.
- Allow each child to have some special things of their own that they don't have to share.
- For younger children, see that there are more than one of the same toys such as matchbox cars so that they can play together without having to share. Two second-hand tricycles are often better fun than one new one that has to be shared.
- If you have three children make sure that the same one is not left out every time. Invite other children over.
- Children need their own bit of space which will not be interfered with by others, even if it is only a drawer.



- Try not to compare children with each other - this always leads to bad feelings.
- Be generous with hugs and affection to all your children.
- Make ground rules. Get your children to help you make some rules about what behaviour is not allowed in your home e.g. name-calling or hitting. Then if you have to step in, you do so because someone has broken a rule, not to take sides.
- When you can see that children are feeling upset, help them to find ways to express their feelings through talking about them. Play that helps includes water play, painting and playdough. For older children and adolescents it may be going for a run or playing music. Children need you to teach them how to solve problems, to listen to each other and then to look for solutions that are fair to both.

When you have to step in

Remember that it is sometimes better not to step in, but to let your children learn to sort things out for themselves. They don't always need an umpire! Step in when behaviour is harming one of the children or things are getting out of control.

- Be aware of your own feelings. If you are feeling angry with one child or more loving towards one particular child, make allowance for this so that you are fair.
- If children come to you for help to sort out a problem, try not to take sides. If tempers are not out of control listen to each child. Tell them you understand that it is a difficult problem. Then tell them you think that they can sort it out for themselves, and you would like to hear what they decide to do.

- If they still need help to sort out the problem, try to help them work it out together. Help them to listen to each other's feelings and try to work out ways to solve the problem. For example, if they are fighting over a TV program you might say: "Joe wants to watch this program and Maria wants to watch the other one. What are some things you can think of to do that would be fair?" You might have to help with suggestions at first. When they have agreed on a solution, give it a try and then check to make sure it is working. If not, have another try at working it out. This is good training for when they are older and need to be able to solve their own problems.

If you need to trouble-shoot

- Sometimes tempers are getting high and you will need to help.
- With a young child who is about to hurt another child, quickly separate them. Keep the child who is angry with you for awhile or find them something different to do until they have calmed down.
- With older children you may have to separate them until tempers cool. Remember that separating children does not solve the problem. When feelings calm down, help them to work out a way to do things differently.

Important note. Being jealous of parents' love for the other children in the family can be a major cause of stress for children. As a parent you will not always feel the same towards all your children. It is natural for parents to feel like this some of the time, sometimes all of the time. Parents often feel guilty about this, but love is a feeling that you can't force. What matters to children is how you treat them. Love can never be shown in exactly the same way for every child, but each child needs to feel sure of being loved.

Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
- Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
- Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
- Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
- Women's Infolink **1800 177 577**
- *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
- *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information

Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

Adapted from information contained in the Parent Easy Guide Series © Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 2000.

Published by the Department of Communities. For reorders phone 3224 4225 if in the Brisbane metropolitan area or 1800 637 711 if outside the metropolitan area.

Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



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