

Parenting Tips
Trempealeau County Promoting Safe and Stable Families
By
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When Kids Fight

Are there times you feel you just don't have the energy to help settle another of your children's fights? As difficult as it may be, it is best not to get in the middle of the spat. Here's why:

- No intervention avoids blaming that creates the following chain reaction: guilty feelings, feelings of inadequacy, resentment, quarreling, more fighting and the circle repeats.
- It allows the children to find solutions themselves. If you step in and save the situation, you set yourself up to be the constant referee.
- Everyone suffers less.

What can you do to as the conflict escalates? The following levels of conflict can best be dealt with as described:

- **Level 1: Normal bickering.** Ignore it. Leave the area if it bothers you.
- **Level 2: Situation heats up.** 1) Recognize their anger toward each other; 2) Listen to each one's side of the story with respect. Both the other sibling and the parent/adult must avoid interrupting each story. 3) Show appreciation for difficulty of the problem. 4) Tell them you have confidence in their ability to reach a solution. (You may have to help them use the problems solving steps that follow.) 5) Leave the room.
- **Level 3: Fight escalates to possible danger.** First ask if this is a real fight or a play fight. If it is not play, stop the fight by separating them. Do not judge who is at fault. (After the situation is calm, go to problem solving steps that follow.)
- **Level 4: If the fight is definitely dangerous,** describe what you see as you separate the children. (Example: "I see the hitting may hurt someone here. This is not allowed. Tim go to the back yard and John go sit on the front porch until you are calm enough to talk about this.") **Again, go on to the problem solving steps when the situation calms down.**

Here are the problem solving steps:

1. Get the children together
2. Each child presents his side of story without interruption.
3. Adult writes down information and reads it back. Adult includes a reflection of feelings.
4. Allow each child to respond – name the problem.
5. Ask for solutions and write all down without comment.
6. Discuss all solutions and decide on one all can live with.
7. Try the solution.
8. Ask yourself: Is it working?

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