



Parent-in-Training

You are not alone in this thing called "parenting"

WRITTEN BY

Decca Knight



bella kids+families

Sibling Squabble

Dear Mrs. Knight,

My two sons, ages six and eight, argue and fight incessantly. It is exhausting. I feel like I break-up around five fights a day. They fight about video games, food, who sits where in the car, whose mess is on the floor, and many other issues. I have tried to handle the fights in different ways, but usually I end up jumping in, trying to figure out who started it, which is at fault, etc. This tactic, however, doesn't seem to be reducing the number of arguments throughout the day. Please help me get my boys under control.

-Tired of being the referee mom

Dear Referee,

Isn't it amazing how the smallest issues can send siblings into a brawl? They figure out that the other has five more Cocoa Puffs in their bowl, and the fight is on. They don't pay attention to how long they have been practicing their spelling words, but if the younger brother gets five extra minutes on the Xbox, the world comes to an end. Oh the drama and inequality of being young.

Often we, as parents, try to help our kids solve their many issues. We lovingly jump-in, trying to figure out who was the instigator, who perpetuated the problem, and who was acting unfairly. We rationalize to ourselves that our interference will "set the record straight." But, we need to pay attention to the understated messages we are sending our kids. We are essentially saying, "You aren't smart enough to figure out this problem on your own. You don't have the capacity or insight to find a solution. You need mommy to rescue you." Eventually our children begin to learn that they don't have to work out the problems between them, because mommy always will.

So, what can you do differently? First you need to teach your children how to work through issues together. Teach them "I-messages" which sound like, "I am upset because you keep stealing my toys without asking, please stop." Teach them listening skills, through modeling or role-play. Work with them on not interrupting, taking turns talking, and understanding their sibling's point of view. Give them options of how they could solve a variety of problems. Could they set a timer and each play with a toy for 15 minutes? Could they take turns sitting in the "preferred" seat in the minivan?

After you have taught and modeled problem solving, you need to begin to let go and empower your children to solve their own problems. Now, I am not saying that you shouldn't get involved in a knockdown, drag-out fight. You always have to keep safety in mind. But, for those frequent sibling quarrels, you need to hand the problem back to your kids. One fun way to do this is by saying, "Guys, each minute that you continue to argue, you are going to have to pay me \$1.00." You are essentially saying to them, "The longer you argue the tougher it will be." They can pay you back with money or toys. Some parents are masters of this technique. When the fight begins they simply look at their watches and start saying, "tick-tock, tick-tock."

Another way to handle arguing is the Love and Logic® Energy Drain technique. Although we only have one son, I use the Energy Drain frequently when he tries to argue with me. I simply say, "When you argue with me, it really drains my energy. We are going to have to figure out how to replace that energy." I then give him a choice of doing some of my chores (while I lazily lounge on the couch) or staying home from a fun event (so I can rest instead of taking him). This technique is equally effective for squabbling siblings. You can simply say, "Kids, you are really draining my energy. The longer you argue, the more energy I lose." You can then dole out the consequences.

So, next time your kids begin to argue, take off your striped referee uniform, sit on the sidelines, and watch the game unfold. With your excellent coaching techniques and league fines, you might be pleasantly surprised at how well your boys rise to the occasion.



If you would like Decca to answer some of your tough parenting questions, contact her through her website www.blueridgeparenting.com.

Decca is a wife, mother, counselor, and parenting educator. In an effort to further help kids and parents, Decca began studying the Love and Logic Parenting® philosophy. She teaches classes to other "Parents-in-training" and runs Blue Ridge Parenting LLC.



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