

*A Clinical Treatment Guide to 10 Common Pediatric Behavioral Problems*

# Sibling Rivalry at Home



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## Sibling rivalry at home

### 1. *Plan breaks from each other.*

When children play or interact together, the possibility of arguments and fights exists. The longer they play together, the greater the likelihood of arguments and fights. It is therefore important to realize that in some cases, children may need a break from each other. Sometimes absence makes the heart grow fonder! If they are spending all day together, and every day together, it might not be a bad idea to plan some periods where they play independently. This will not solve the problem completely, but should help out to some degree.

### 2. *Be Vigilant!*

Be on the lookout for potential conflict! If you are usually catching the argument way after the blows have been struck, then increased vigilance on your part is paramount. You should be aware of what your children are doing, i.e., an open-ear for sounds that appear to be headed for an argument. Your vigilance to potential escalating arguments is vital.

### 3. *Adopt the Mommy-court approach to disputes regarding items or toys.*

Many arguments and fights with children are over two (or more) of them wanting the same item or toy at the same time. While we would like for our children to learn to share, leaving them to work out the solution to this problem usually leads to arguments and fights. The best way to teach them to share is to have them bring their case to the judge (you) before it comes to blows. This is how it proceeds. At the start of a dispute the children are taught to come to you (the judge) with their complaint regarding the toy in question. Get an oven timer and set it for a small length of time, allowing one child to have that item first. Your other child gets it after the timer goes off, for the same length of time. The child who had the toy first must part with it willingly. If the child who gets it first stops playing with the toy before the timer is up, the second child may get the toy at that time.

### 4. *Aggression should always result in the aggressor(s) not getting the toy (and time-out removal).*

Once you have given your children a more acceptable way to resolve their disputes and they fail to resort to such, the consequence should be loss of the desired toy for some specified

period of time. Arguments and aggression should result in the children's inability to get the desired toy in the immediate future. This would require a removal from the play area for a brief time out, in addition to loss of access to the preferred item for a designated period of time.

5. *Solving disputes via Mommy-court should be praised and reinforced.*

If arguing and fighting are to decrease dramatically, then teaching your children to come to you to solve a dispute in a fair and equitable manner is necessary. Therefore, implementing a point system (along with praise) when they come to the Mommy-court is strongly advised. Each child who comes to the parent to solve a dispute and then abides by the ruling should be reinforced. Keep track of this information in a journal format.

6. *Physical aggression should result in a more significant consequence.*

If the children hit each other, you might consider the loss of a privilege or early bedtime that day as a consequence for the transgressor(s). Here is a real case example. Cesar (not real name), a seven-year-old boy, was referred to me for behavioral services as a result of his mother's request to receive help to control his aggression to his younger brother. Like many siblings arguments occur, but his mother felt she could not control his aggression towards his brother and was worried about it someday getting out of hand. His mother felt that now was the time to extinguish such a behavioral pattern from his repertoire.

After collecting a base rate of aggressive behavior, we designed a plan of action. The plan we designed incorporated both usual bedtime and TV access during prime time as earned privileges. Each aggressive incident toward his sibling would result in one strike. When Cesar reached two strikes, he went to bed one hour early that night (effectively missing all his favorite prime time shows). Cesar did not go to bed early for the first three weeks of the plan. Subsequently, his mother and I agreed to reduce the cut-off to one strike. Cesar continued to succeed on the plan (read Section IV in free downloadable ebook, *Punishment on Trial*, for further information on arranging consequences).

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