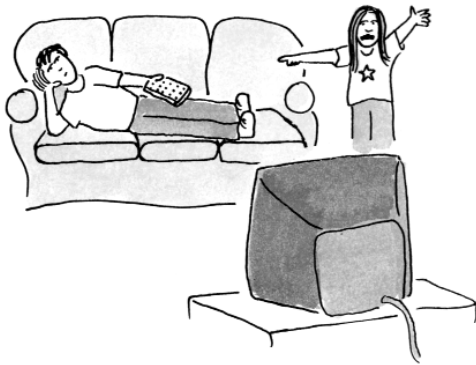


**Encourage win-win deals.** When children seem stuck, lead them through the problem-solving steps: *Stop the action, listen to each other, name the problem, think of ways to solve the problem, choose a plan that fits everyone, carry out the plan, and see how well the plan worked.*

Most young children will need adult help in this process, and it does take time. But after doing this over and over, children soon will get better at solving their own problems.



**Encourage personal goals.** Sometimes it helps to encourage children to “compete” against themselves by improving their own skills. Use this to teach your children about practicing, trying hard, and doing his best.

**Don’t overlook cruel behavior!** Sometimes fighting between siblings is more than just “normal kid stuff.” Step in if one child is hurting the other, either physically or emotionally. Sibling abuse is often ignored, but it is real and can be dangerous and painful.

# Putting Knowledge to Work



When you have a question, call or visit your local office of The University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service.

You’ll find a friendly, well-trained staff ready to help you with information, advice, and free publications covering agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development.

**REVISED BY DON BOWER,**

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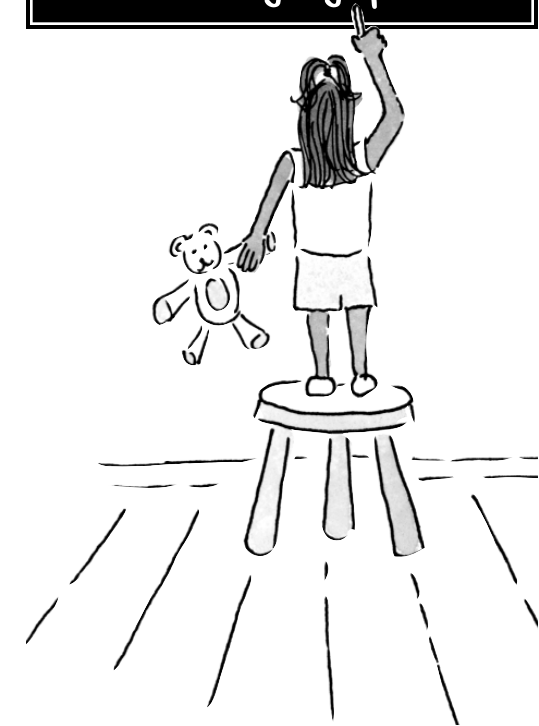
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GALE A. BUCHANAN, DEAN & DIRECTOR

# TIPS FOR PARENTS

## Getting Along: Sibling Fights



The University of Georgia

Cooperative Extension Service

College of Family and Consumer Sciences  
and College of Agricultural and  
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## Getting Along: Sibling Fights

There are a number of reasons that kids quarrel, fight, and tease. Sometimes they are tired, hungry, or just bored. Other times they want attention, company, or they want to feel powerful. Understanding why kids fight can help you know how to prevent it.

1. **BASIC NEEDS.** It never fails. Whenever you are the busy – shopping, cleaning, or running errands – quarreling breaks out. “Mom, he hit me.” “She took my book!” “He called me dumb!” Sound familiar?

### What parents can do:

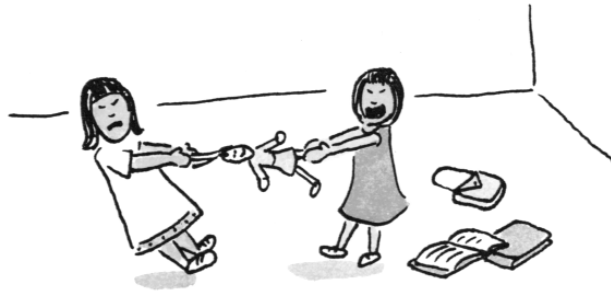
Ask what basic needs are not being met. Kids who are tired, hungry, or bored are not going to feel cheerful and cooperative—would you? A few minutes of rest, a healthy snack, and something fun to do can work wonders.

2. **ATTENTION.** Sometimes kids squabble in order to get attention. If this happens in your house, it may be time to “reprogram” your kids so that only good behavior gets rewarded.

### What parents can do:

**Ignore small quarrels.** Ignore the fight only if no one is in danger of getting hurt. Stay calm, and don't speak or look at your children. If things don't seem too out of control, it might help to leave the room or listen to music with headphones. **Make sure** to give attention for good behavior at other times!

**Spend time with each child.** Fifteen to 20 minutes of one-to-one attention with a child each day will reduce whining and fighting. Give positive attention by reading to your child, playing a game, or just involving him in routine tasks.



**Teach children to ask for attention in a positive way.** Say things like, “When you need a hug, let me know,” or “Yelling hurts my ears. Tap on my shoulder and ask for help instead.”

**Make each child feel special.** It's almost impossible to treat children exactly the same. Encourage your child's unique traits and interests. Don't make comparisons! “Angie loves to draw and paint,” is better than, “Angie is a better artist than Jason.”

3. **COMPANY.** Some children seem to have a knack for getting brothers and sisters to play with them. Other children don't, but they know that starting a fight with a sibling is a quick way to get them involved.

### What parents can do:

**Teach children how to involve their siblings.** Teach them something as basic as saying, “Would you play with me?”

**Provide activities that children of different ages can do together.** Older children get frustrated when a younger sibling wants to play. Teach them how to give younger children a simple task. Pretending, play dough, blocks, puppets, and musical activities all work well for siblings.

**Teach children how to make a deal.** Children can learn how to trade one toy for another and how to take turns. Show a toddler how to trade for a toy instead of just grabbing for it. With older children, focus on how to take turns. Sometimes a kitchen timer helps by making sure each child gets equal time with a toy.

4. **POWER.** Children notice when a sibling can do something they cannot. Competition between siblings can make children feel very insecure. Learning to handle competitive feelings is a real challenge for young children.

### What parents can do:

**Don't take sides.** Calmly but firmly separate younger children and lead them to separate rooms. Don't yell or lecture. Let them cool down and then talk to them.

Sit older kids on the floor near each other. When they each tell you what they did wrong, they can get up. Each child has to “confess” his own actions, not the other child's. This technique helps children accept responsibility for their actions instead of blaming.

**Give them choices.** As children learn to make simple choices, they begin learning how to make decisions. They also learn the consequences of those simple decisions. Making good decisions takes practice.