



Getting On

How to help siblings get along

Each child as an individual

- Your children might need different rules and boundaries depending on their ages and temperaments. But they need to feel that you love and value them all equally – this way, they won't feel they have to compete for your affection and attention. You can **foster these feelings by spending special time with each child** regularly, giving lots of hugs and smiles to everyone, and trying not to compare children with each other.
- Although children need to learn about sharing, it's also helpful if they have some special things of their own that they don't have to share. A little bit of private space – even just a drawer that siblings can't get into – is a good idea too.
- Children will also feel valued if you make it clear that it's not OK for younger children to mess up older children's activities, and vice versa.



Set clear family rules

Rules let children know what's OK and what's not. If you have family rules in place, it's easier for you to remind children of how you expect them to treat each other.

Here are some **tips for making rules work**:

- Involve children in setting up rules. This will help your children remember them.
- Put a copy of your house rules on the fridge or somewhere everyone can see them.
- Follow through every time children bend or break the rules. Start with a friendly reminder – 'Are we all speaking nicely to each other?' Then give another chance. If children still break the rules, use an agreed consequences.



Set up routines

It's much easier to handle disagreements about everyday things when you have a family routine. It means that everyone knows who sits where, who does what chores and on what days, and who's first in line for the PlayStation, trampoline or bathroom.

A **sample routine** might look like this:

- Television: Samantha chooses the program from 6.30-7 pm. Jake chooses from 7.30-8 pm (after Samantha has gone to bed).
- Games: Jake chooses on Saturdays, Samantha chooses on Sundays.
- Bathroom: Jake uses the bathroom first in the morning, then Samantha.
- Jobs: Samantha and Jake take it in turns to do jobs – bin duty one week, drying the dishes the next week.

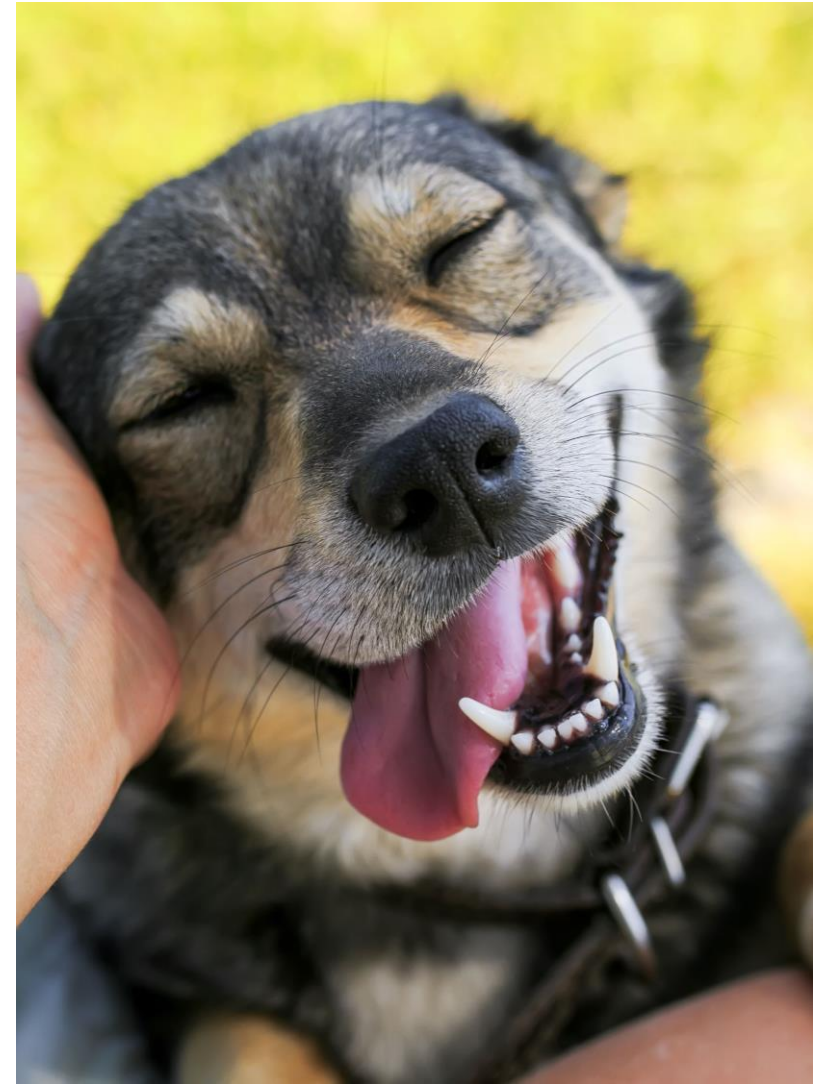


Catch them being good.

This means noticing and giving positive feedback to your children when they're behaving well. When you **tell children clearly and specifically what they're doing well**, you're much more likely to see that behaviour again.

Here are some examples of clear and specific praise and encouragement:

- 'I really like the way you're both taking turns on the trampoline.'
- 'You're all sharing and playing really nicely together.'
- 'Hey, you worked out that problem really well. How about we celebrate with a movie tonight?'



Show them how to get along

- You are your children's number-one role model. Your children will notice if you work out differences without fighting.
- If you want your children to work things out calmly and respectfully, they need to see you doing this. If you want them to be able to say sorry to others, they need to see you apologising too.



Coaching children

You are your children's problem-solving coach. You teach them how to handle disagreements and guide them towards skills for managing angry feelings, negotiating and playing fair. This is better than being a referee who breaks up fights or steps in when they're brewing.

Here are some **tips for coaching your children in problem-solving**:

- Step in with ideas as soon as you see that children are finding it hard to work things out. For example, 'Remember to share', or 'Can you boys think of a way that you can both have a turn?'
- Talk things over later. With older children, working out a blame-free solution afterwards will make the fight less likely to happen again. For example, 'How could you have handled it so that both of you got to use the computer?'
- Help children find ways to express upset or angry feelings through calm words or positive activities. For example, water play, painting and playdough help younger children express feelings. Older children and teenagers might find that going for a run or playing music helps.
- Teach and model the social skill of 'respectful disagreeing'. This involves saying something that you can both agree on, then saying what you don't agree on. For example, 'I agree that Grandma gave you the book for your birthday, but I don't think it's fair to stop your sister reading it if she asks politely'.



Hot spots

It can help to think ahead about how to handle fights in tricky situations. In some cases it might help to explain that if fighting breaks out, you'll remove a treat or privilege (or whatever your family rules say). But it's also a good idea to set things up so that there are fewer opportunities for children to fight.

Here are some ideas to help you plan for common fighting hot spots.

At home:

- Make sure there are enough toys for everyone, so they can play together without always having to take turns.
- Distract children or change the environment if you sense a fight coming. For example, suggest a new game, join in yourself for a while, take the children outside to play, or read a book with a child on either side of you.
- If you need to make a phone call, set children up with an activity (or two separate activities) that will keep them interested



Let children work it out sometimes

With your help, children can learn to work out disagreements by themselves, without fighting. This can help your children get along better and deal positively with conflicts with other children.

Here are some tips for helping your children work things out:

- **Let children go** if they're trying to work things out. Talking, debating and even arguing are all signs that children are trying to work things out. Add some enthusiastic feedback about the way they're interacting. For example, 'Hey, I'm really proud of the way you're trying to work this out on your own'.
- **Keep an eye on the action.** This is your best chance of preventing full-scale fights.
- **Give some tips.** A few well-placed suggestions might be all children need. For example, 'Can you think of a way you can all use the computer when you need to?' or 'Remember to be fair and take turns. Whose turn was it last?'
- **Give friendly reminders** about rules of the house, what you expect and what will happen if a fight breaks out. For example, 'Remember we all speak nicely', or 'Are you keeping your hands and feet to yourselves?'
- Sometimes disagreements about the computer or a favourite toy seem to turn into name-calling and arguing straight away. If this sounds like your situation, you might want to start the reminders and coaching as soon as the computer is turned on or the toy comes out.





Ideas sourced from: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/behaviour/friends-siblings/preventing-fights>