

Parents often worry about their children fighting with each other. Some conflict between children in families is normal. It is part of how children learn to get along with others.

- **Parents can help reduce fighting by making sure that each child feels equally loved and valued. Clear family rules and routines can help too.**
- **Show your children how to work things out fairly. It will help them learn how to get along with others. Parents need to step in before things get out of hand or someone gets hurt.**

Conflict between children

Arguments between brothers and sisters are one of the ways children learn how to be fair, to respect others and to resolve differences. Learning how to argue fairly without hurting anyone is a skill that will help them in their future relationships.

Children may fight about your love and compete for your attention. They can feel jealous if you seem to have more time for one child, or to treat one child better than another. Even adult children can be jealous of their siblings. Children may fight if they feel hurt, angry or unfairly treated.

Some children fight more than others because of their temperament, their age or because they are still learning the skills they need to get along with others.

Children will fight less as they grow up and develop better social skills.

Reducing conflict

Parents can reduce conflict by:

- **making sure each child feels equally loved and valued**
 - try to spend equal time with each child on their own
 - the things you do with them may be different due to their ages and interests
- **having clear, simple family rules that encourage fairness and respect for others**—for example, ‘we always take turns’, ‘we never hit people’, ‘we are kind to each other’, ‘we say sorry’
 - let your children help set the rules
 - put a copy on the fridge as a reminder
 - agree what will happen if rules are broken

- **having household routines** – for example, where people sit for meals, who washes the dishes on different days

- **giving lots of praise when children work things out well**

- say what you like about their behaviour—for example, ‘I really like the way you are sharing that’, ‘it’s great that you are both taking turns’, ‘I like it when you are kind to each other’—this helps guide their behaviour and builds their self-esteem and confidence

- **helping children to be kind to each other**—for example, make cards or presents for birthdays.

It can help to:

- **make time to have fun together as a family**—it’s a chance to show children how to play fairly
- **ensure that a child is not always left out of games**—if you are having friends over, try to have a friend for each child to play with at the same time
- **allow children to have special things of their own** that the other one does not touch
- **give them each something small if you are buying gifts**, rather than one big thing to share.

Keep an eye on your children so you know how fights start. It may look like one child always starts fights but this may not be the case. If you rescue the child you think is being picked on, the other child may feel unfairly treated and be angry and upset.

Show your children how to resolve things fairly. Having clear family rules can help.



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Stepping in

Always step in before fighting gets out of hand or someone gets hurt. If you have to step in:

- **be aware of your own feelings and stay calm** – if you feel unable to cope at times ask a trusted adult to help
- **separate your children if you need to** – this does not solve the problem and you will need to deal with it later
- **don't take sides or focus on blame**
- **remind your children about the rules and what happens if they are broken** – any consequences should happen soon after the fighting.

It is not helpful to say:

- a child 'should know better' or call them 'a troublemaker'
- that one child is better behaved than the other.

If your children are upset, talk with them about their feelings.

When things are calmer

Talk with your children about better ways to do things next time. Ask them what else they could have done.

- Make sure that each child has a say and they know you have heard them.
- Remind children of the family rules. Family meetings may work for older children.
- Help children have an outlet for their feelings without fighting, for example active play, creative activities, sport or music.

Allow children to resolve their own conflicts at times. Too much of your attention may reinforce fighting.

Contacts

Child and Family Centres (parenting information and support)	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Gungahlin	6207 0120
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Tuggeranong	6207 8228
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: West Belconnen	6205 2904
Kids Help Line	24-hour	1800 55 1800
Parentline ACT	9am–9pm Monday–Friday, except public hols	6287 3833

Websites

www.cyh.com	Parenting and child health information
www.kidshelp.com.au	Kids helpline
www.parentlink.act.gov.au	Other parenting guides including: Children biting, Coping skills, Families that work well, Growing and learning in the family, Second baby, Tantrums
www.raisingchildren.net.au	Covering topics for parenting newborns to teens

This guide's content has been produced by Parenting SA, Women's and Children's Health Network, and adapted by the ACT Government to reflect the application to laws of the Australian Capital Territory.

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