

Parents can model dealing with unfairness by sharing stories about things that seemed unfair to them and how they dealt with it. For example, someone at work who has more days' vacation leave, because they have been working for the organisation for longer.

But generally, Dr Lee says, "I find children actually say 'that's not fair' not so much because they are so concerned about fairness, but actually because that is what makes their parents attend to them!"

- **Special needs** - Talking openly about the issues a brother or sister may have is important, as well as listening carefully to their concerns and feelings. Behaviour that is difficult or disturbing, is less upsetting and less likely to result in retaliation when it is understood that it is not done to purposefully harm the other one.

Being generous with support and encouragement, can also help keep a sibling from acting out to get attention. If one child needs a behaviour sticker chart for example, offer one to the other child/children as well. Also setting aside special one-on-one time with each sibling - even just a monthly breakfast date or five-minute game, can go a long way toward making everyone feel important.

(<https://childmind.org/article/when-siblings-wont-stop-fighting/>)



Keep safe and should you require counselling, you are welcome to contact Social Work Services at 079 880 5966 or 012 393 5472 or liaise with any of the SAPS's Family and Relationship Desk members:

- Lt Col C Kleingeld at 012 393 5192 and kleingeldc@saps.gov.za
- Capt V Nkosi at 012 393 5244 and NkosiViolet@saps.gov.za
- Capt LK Mahlase at 012 393 5187 and MahlaseL2@saps.gov.za.

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**WHAT ARE PARENTS TO DO WHEN IT
SEEMS LIKE THE
CHILDREN ARE
CONSTANTLY FIGHTING**

Anyone with more than one child knows that even siblings who are the best of friends, can sometimes get on each other's nerves. And it is certainly understandable at a time like this, when they are forced to spend much of their free time together and are competing for limited attention and resources.

But what are parents to do when things escalate, as it can make the home feel like a battlefield and the adults more like peace negotiators than parents. Fortunately, Dr Stephanie Lee, director of the ADHD and Behaviour Disorders Centre at the Child Mind Institute, says there is a bright side. While sibling squabbles are certainly unpleasant and can even become stressful, "having siblings give children good practice for the social skills that they need in the real world. Parents should see these situations as opportunities to teach" says Dr Lee. Learning to navigate conflicts with siblings in a healthy and constructive manner, can teach children about taking turns, sharing, when to turn to an adult, and using words rather than physical force to solve a problem.

Here are a few things parents can do to keep the peace at home:

- **Get to the root of the conflict** - Often parents end up playing referee or breaking up fights over and over again. But to truly break the cycle, it is crucial to take a step back and try to determine the cause of the conflict, so that you can address that instead. For example, if it seems like your children are always fighting over toys, try to look for a pattern - when does it happen?



Dr Lee points out that frequently siblings will start fighting over a toy seemingly out of nowhere, after a brief period of peace. She says that: "What the children might really be fighting for, is their parents' attention. Children are not really so concerned about the toy, it is more that they have figured out that when I yell or kick, someone gets involved immediately."

- **Praise the positive** – Dr Lee suggests that you become involved proactively by saying: 'I see you are sharing that toy,' or, 'Wow, great job taking turns,' or, 'I love how you guys are playing together.' Letting your children drink up that positive attention may help reduce their need for negative attention later.
- **Make a plan** - Despite all the positive reinforcement in the world, siblings will still fight. Another thing that parents can do, is to coach the older siblings to respond in a productive way rather than escalating a conflict. For example, if a younger sibling is always knocking down structures, go to a separate room to build, or even build structures specifically for the other one to destruct.

Parents can make it clear that there is a difference between running to an adult every time there is the slightest disagreement, and seeking help to resolve an issue or to alert the adult if a sibling is becoming violent.

If there is a constant source of conflict, making a plan can help ease the tension. For example, if a set of older siblings always fight over who gets to sit in the front passenger seat of the car, a plan could be made that both children agree on – they can take turns or one could sit in the front seat on even days and the other on odd days. That way they know what to expect.

Setting a timer for taking turns with a sought-after object, is another practical tactic. It is important though, to be clear on what items could be shared and which are reserved. Parents can give children three stickers each to put on three special items that are off-limits to siblings, and these stickers may be switched if their moods and likes change.

The important thing is to be clear and consistent, and to set up predictable outcomes — all while praising your children whenever they seem to be doing a great job of dealing with differences.

- **Reward positive behaviour** - Another way to create a more positive social dynamic, is to celebrate positive behaviour. According to Dr Lee, celebrating positive behaviour is for example to encourage your children to come and tell you when their sibling shares a toy or is kind, then make a big deal out of the positive actions of both children. You may, for example, start a money jar that buys them pizza when it is full or have some other means of documenting all the good deeds.
- **If you take something away, give it back** - Even when you do all of this, there are going to be times when the children are playing tug of war with a toy and it feels like the only way to intervene, is to remove the source of conflict. Dr Lee says that it is fine to do that, but to make sure you give the toy back to them within a few minutes and give them a chance to practise using it appropriately - otherwise they will not really be learning how to work cooperatively. This may mean getting them to agree to taking turns with the help of a timer and then praising them for implementing the arrangement.
- **Forget fair** - "That is not fair!" is a common cry of children of all ages, and it is easy for parents to get caught up in ensuring that everything is on an even footing between siblings. But Dr Lee points out that life is not fair, and it is not realistic for every single thing in the home to be equal at all times - older children may be allowed to stay up later and younger children may feel that this is a great injustice. Parents can explain the logic behind the 'unfair' exception, but they do not need to give explanations for everything - if that is the rule, that is the rule.

