



Tips for Parents: Arguing Kids

Most siblings bicker frequently. They fight to defend their territory--"Get outta MY ROOM!"-- to demonstrate how smart they are--"A moth is too a butterfly!"-- and over what games they'll play. They usually try to involve their parents and caregivers by tattling. Read on for tips to encourage them to stop arguing and play nice.

1. Encourage them to solve their own problems. Kids aren't born knowing how to resolve conflict. It's a skill they have to learn, and if their parents and caregivers always intervene, they don't learn to do it. Take time when they're not arguing to teach them ways to get along. A useful approach uses the acronym IDEAL. Learn how to teach your kids this approach at <http://actagainstviolence.apa.org/materials/handouts/FamilySPS2.pdf> When they come a'tattling, make sure that no one is acting out violently, and then calmly say, "I know that you two can solve this problem yourselves. Remember the steps for resolving conflict we've talked about? Use those." Then, keep tabs on the situation, but don't step in unless things get ugly. Later, after things have been resolved, tell them they've done a good job working together to find a solution.

2. Keep 'em busy. Kids that are bored are kids that pick fights with each other. When they're younger, make sure they have plenty of toys, games, activities, and books around to keep them entertained. As they get older, encourage them to think up their own activities. Older kids sometimes get stuck in a rut and will complain about being bored. I've found that the fastest way to get them thinking up something to do is to say, "Well, if you can't think of anything to do, I've got some work around the house that needs to be done." It works every time.

3. Be a good example. If you and your partner or spouse argue in front of the kids all the time, don't be the least bit surprised to see the kids following your example. Avoid pettiness, and learn healthy ways to deal with the frustrations you have with one another. You should NEVER fight in front of your children--kids feel frightened and insecure when their parents fight, and worry about divorce. Instead, work out the larger conflicts behind closed doors, and make sure the kids can't hear you.

Small disagreements, however, are great learning opportunities for your kids. Use IDEAL, or another conflict resolution tool, to solve minor problems in front of the children. Say something like, "Hhmm...it looks like we're having trouble agreeing on what we should do. Let's use IDEAL to find a solution we can both be happy with."

4. Make sure you're giving them enough positive attention. Kids who don't get enough attention from being good will find a way to get it from being naughty. If they're picking fights and always trying to involve you, take a look at how you interact with them on a daily basis. If you're pointing out their faults or nagging them more than you're showing them love, support,

and genuine interest in their day-to-day life, you have to make a change. Take time to be positive with them and you'll likely see a huge improvement.

5. Get creative. Not every method will work for every child. Sometimes, you have to get creative. Occasionally, when it seems my kids have been bickering more than usual, and I can't find an obvious cause, I do something completely unexpected. Some things I've done in the past to get them laughing or remind them they love each other:

- Made up a silly song about fighting and done a little dance on the spot
- Make them give each other five hugs and five kisses
- Have them tell each other five things they like about one another

6. Remember they have a right not to like one another. Sometimes, kids go through phases when they can't stand each other. While you should require that they treat each other with respect, you can't make them like each other. Just like adults, kids have their preferences when it comes to people. If you think this is happening, brainstorm some activities to do as a family that might help them remember they're not arch enemies. But don't force it--you'll only cause more resentment.

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