

FIGHTING

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Where there are two children a fight is likely to brew. Learning to use your words instead of your fists is a skill that takes time. We had a rule in our home that every person in the home was kind to each other. It is not kind to punch someone

because you are angry. You teach most by what you model; spanking and hitting look just the same to a small child. Is it kind to pelt a child's body because he or she made a mistake?

For more on this "to spank or not to spank" issue, check under "parenting truths".

An angry parent runs into a room where two darling children are hitting each other. "Why are you fighting?" the parent asks. One child makes a statement as to the lack of worth of their sibling, and the sibling retaliates with some hateful statement about their brother or sister.

The parent is caught in the middle. Lying has been invited into the arena. Nothing is getting solved and the two children, having heard lies or accusations about themselves, get angrier and angrier. Disaster is headed to this situation like a speeding train.

First of all, don't ask why. The answer to why they are fighting is none of your business. They need to learn to get along. The parent needs to set the rules for fighting. Hitting is not allowed.

If there is an obvious solution to the children's problem (you play with that toy for fifteen minutes and when the timer goes off it is your turn for fifteen minutes with the toy), the parent might ask the children to find a solution. If an argument erupts, stop the action! "It doesn't look like you two want to get along today. For the next hour, Kathleen you go into the dining room with your toys and play. Scott, you take your toys into the living room; there will be no TV while you are there." Separate them for an hour. If, at the end of the hour, they still don't choose to get along, separate them for a second hour.

This is the rule: If you play together well, you stay together. Fight, and you are separated.

Footnote: Skills are best taught out of the heat of a battle. If one child is constantly taking the other child's toy away, talk to him/her about that. Explain that it is important to take turns with toys. Tell the child that he/she does not have the right to take a toy away from another child. Set up a consequence : "Should I see you take Kathleen's toy away from her again, I will give her the toy and you will have a fifteen minute time out."

Behavior that is rewarded continues, behavior that is not rewarded stops.

FIGHTING IN THE CAR

Children have an instinct for knowing when the parent cannot do anything to stop their behavior. For instance, they know that you must pay attention when you are driving and they can, therefore, do whatever they want to do in the back seat. So, they check it out and begin hitting each other.

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When you scream and yell at children, they cannot hear you. Therefore, screaming at them to stop fighting is useless. Threatening is not a strategy that comes from power. It is also time consuming and tedious to remember who you threatened with what and follow through.

Ask the children to stop fighting. When the fighting continues, pull the car over to the side of the road. Stop the engine. Turn off the radio. Sit there. Say nothing. Watch the traffic. Relax. Pretty soon a voice from the back seat will ask, "Mom?" (or "Dad?") To which you will answer in a pleasant voice (because you are not angry, you are simply answering the children's question, "Is this how we use power?"), "Yes?" And the child will continue, "Why did you stop the car?" Once again, in your relaxed voice respond, "It is not safe for me to drive when children are fighting." Then return to daydreaming or watching traffic. When the children promise to stop fighting, drive the car again. If they start fighting again, stop the car.

If you are going to start this training on a day in which you need to be somewhere, set your clocks a half hour ahead so you won't be pressured by the ticking of your car clock.

Children hate to be bored. It is very boring to sit in a quiet car doing nothing. An adult can sit quietly faaaaaar longer than a child can sit. Therein lies your power --and no one needs to get angry or be harmed.

FIGHTING SPOILING OUTING FUN (EMAIL CONVERSATION)

QUESTION: When we go to do something fun, my kids always get upset when it is time to leave and we get into a big fight, which spoils the fun.

ANSWER: There are a few things to remember about how children play: (1) Children are 100% into every moment; they do not change gears rapidly. It is wise to provide a warning, "We will be going home in ten minutes. Play really hard and then it will be time to come with me." Hold up one finger when their play time is almost over, and then call them into you. Any child who refuses to come will have the consequence of (sitting in the front seat of the car with you, not playing for the first few minutes when you get home as that child is sitting in the remembering chair, etc.)

If children misbehave on a fun outing, find a way to have a penalty box (yes, just like in hockey). The child gets to sit in the time out place for five minutes. It is boring to just sit and watch. Sitting there several times for a five minute section will get the attention of the child. Remember that some children feed off the energy in a crowd getting very wound up-- this child needs some loving attention and a way to diffuse that wound up energy, like talking slowly, taking deep breaths while you stand quietly.