

12 STEPS TO HELP YOUR KIDS STOP FIGHTING

by Naomi Drew

Did you know that 70% of all families have children who fight physically? If your family is one of them, take heart, you are not alone. The good news is, physical fighting can be eliminated or strongly alleviated if you are willing to make some important changes. Too often we unwittingly reinforce fighting through our actions, words, or, in some cases, inaction. By implementing the steps below, you will decrease the incidences of physical fighting for the long term:

1. Speak to each child separately and listen to their needs.

Hear them out and listen for root causes of fights - jealousy, stress, frustration, misplaced anger, feeling left out, boredom, habit? Listen with an open heart and try to understand. Validate your child's feelings through reflective listening. Example: "So you feel like I favor your brother." Even if you disagree with what your child expresses remember that he has a right to feel what he feels. By empathizing we relieve some of the negative energy that leads to fights, and we show our children that we really DO want to understand how they feel.

Then ask, "What can we do to solve this problem?" Your child needs to be part of the solution. Also, see if there's something you need to change in your own behavior (having short fuse, showing favoritism, being inconsistent). End the conversation with a hug and reassurance of your love

2. Have a family meeting to address the problem together.

Do this at a neutral time when you're all relatively relaxed. Start by appealing to your children's hearts and spirits. Let them know how much you love them. Ask your children what a peaceful home would feel like to them. Affirm the goodness of each child, and tell them that when physical fighting occurs, the peace in your home is shattered. Let your children know how hard it is to watch the people you love so deeply hurting each other.

3. Teach them how to cool off .

Make a list with each child of things that help them calm down when they're mad. Here are a few suggestions to start with:

go into another room	squash a stress ball
wash your face	clean out a drawer
take a long drink of water	go outside and breathe the fresh air
take five slow deep breaths	hug a stuffed animal
write an angry letter and throw it away	do push-ups or sit-ups
go outside and run	scribble on a large piece of paper

4. Let your children know that you love each one uniquely. Many fights stem from jealousy. We love each child in his or her own special way, and it's very important that we convey this in words, not just assume that our children know it. We may express our love differently with each child, but that doesn't mean that we love one child more than the other. Tenderly explain this.

5. Trust your role as parent.

Set the expectation for a fight-free home and stick with it. You are the most powerful role model your children have and your words make a difference. Make it clear that hurting each other is absolutely unacceptable under any circumstance, and you expect your children to honor this.

6. Catch your children in the act of working out problems and affirm them for it.

Each time you see your kids cooling off, compromising, or giving "I messages" instead of hitting

(Example: “I don’t want you grabbing things from me.”), let them know how proud you are. Ask how they felt about the good choice they made. This further reinforces good behaviors and holds up a mirror to your children's best selves.

7. Teach empathy.

If one child hurts the other, let him know how it made you feel, and ask the following questions:

- How do you think that made your brother/sister feel?
- How would you feel if someone did that to you?
- What can you do to make it better?

8. Spend 15-20 minutes a day of uninterrupted time with each child.

You can alternate with your partner, and if you’re a single parent, alternate nights with each child. When you spend this sacred time with your children, honor it completely by not answering the phone or allowing in any external distractions. If your kids are old enough, have them occupy each other when you’re with a sibling. Remind them that their time will come too. Doing this on a regular basis gives each child a strong message that he is very important to you. This is a powerful tool in preventing fights.

9. What are you and your partner modeling? Ask yourself this question. If your children are observing a lot of conflict, they will follow suit. Children learn by imitation, and as parents, we need to be extremely mindful of the examples we set. What we do, we will eventually see in them.

10. Limit intake of violent TV shows, videos, and computer games.

Children who regularly view violent acts on screen are more apt to be physically aggressive. Pre-screen videos your child wants to see and strongly discourage movies or games with violent content

11. If a fight occurs, take immediate action. Let your children know unequivocally that physical fighting is not acceptable. Give each child a time-out in a separate spot. After they’ve had a chance to cool off, talk to each child individually. Hear them out and try to understand what motivated their actions. Ask what they can do differently next time.

12. If fighting still continues, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there some underlying need or issue in any of your children that has not been addressed? If so, what might it be?
- Is there a pattern to the fights? Are there specific circumstances that are setting your children off? If so, what can be done to change this?
- Are you and your partner sticking with the “no-fight” commitment, or is one of you looking the other way? It’s critical that you are both on the same page.
- Are your kids testing to see if you’re going to follow through? If this is the case, give stronger consequences for fighting: take away a special toy, video game, or computer game, or take away a privilege like TV or staying up late on the weekend. Avoid taking away things like sports or birthday parties. And, if you say you’re going to take something away, then make sure you follow through. Otherwise you’ll reinforce the fighting.

If you have done everything suggested here and your children are still fighting, consider some family counseling. Better to address the issue now than wait for it to escalate. With mindfulness and the willingness to make changes, fighting is something that you have the power to change.