



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

Sibling Fighting

Every parent has heard the following phrases from their children: “That’s mine, not yours!” “Dad, he took my stuff!” “Mam, she won’t stay out of my side of the room!” Sometimes it can be simply annoying and frustrating and get on your nerves like a fork scraping off a plate. However other times, what starts off as something small can quickly escalate into something much bigger with you as the parent quickly finding yourself in the role of referee trying to restore some peace and quiet back into the home.

Any parent with teenage girls has most likely found themselves in the following scenario:

Scene: Bedroom, Just before the disco: “No, give me my top back, it’s not yours!” “But I just want to wear it to the disco, I’ve no other top to wear” “I don’t care, it’s not yours, find something else to wear”, around about now a parent will typically shout “Will you just give it to her?! She’s your sister!” at which point the owner of the top walks off complaining about life being unfair.

As life is busy, parents are often more interested in peace and quiet rather than justice. For this reason they will often go to the sibling who is most likely to listen to them or who they think should know better (usually the oldest) and try to get them to sole the disagreement.

The difficulty with this approach is that it can cause resentment on the part of that sibling, who will get tired of always being the one responsible for resolving the conflict and so the sibling fighting will continue.

A more helpful approach when siblings fight is to help them to work it out themselves. This teaches them important skills such negotiation, problem-solving, and tolerance. To do this, parents need to move from role of referee to that of mediator, helping each child hear the others perspective on the disagreement and encouraging them to come up with solutions that can work for everybody. So for example, in the above situation, you might learn that the sister is annoyed because her sister did not ask to borrow the top and ruined another top belonging to her. The other sister may say that it was an accident that the other top got ruined; and a solution in this case may be that she asks if she wants to borrow clothes from her sister and replaces anything that is ruined.

Although the main aim is to help siblings work things out for themselves, remember there are times when you will have to intervene, for example if one of your children physically harms a sibling, then it is important to become involved and make sure there is a consequence for that child for his actions.

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