

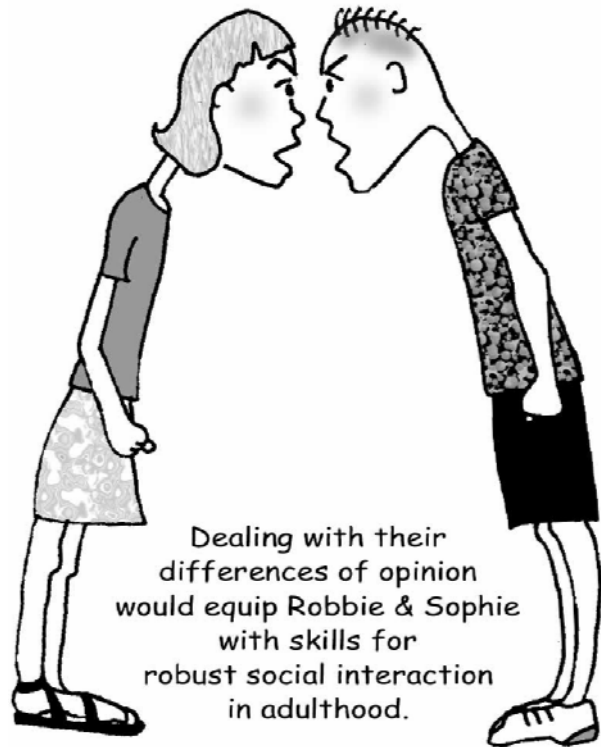
## What to Do When Children Fight

Parents want their children to love each other, and they find it hard to see their children quarrel. Yet sibling rivalry can be positive - sibling relationships provide opportunities for children to stand up for themselves, compromise and get along with others.

Sibling rivalry is a normal part of life in families with more than one child. Brothers and sisters do fight, but parents don't have to stay and listen to them! Kids should be allowed to work out their problems on their own, and parents should intervene only if the battles get physically or verbally abusive.

Families can establish rules for getting along with others, such as no name calling, hitting or teasing. Parents can set an example through their own behaviour but should remember that it's normal for siblings to fight.

The way parents respond when their kids argue influences the way the kids will behave toward each other. If Mom or Dad comes running whenever the children get into conflict, they learn that fighting gets their parents' attention, so they will fight more. If the parents don't intervene, the kids have to learn to talk to each other and solve their problems. Parent involvement usually complicates disputes. If the children are fighting over a toy, the problem is the toy. But if Dad intervenes, each child wants him on his or her side. The parent becomes another source of contention.



Here are some things to remember when the kids argue:

- Be proactive, not reactive. Teach children to handle conflicts before they arise. Parents can explain how they handle conflict and should praise kids when they cooperate with each other.
- Be objective. Parents shouldn't argue over who started it or who's to blame, but should let the children work it out. If the conflict might become physical, a parent should step in and encourage the kids to talk. Each child should tell his side of the story. They should be separated if they need to calm down. When kids hit, stop the hurting behaviour and demand an apology. Explain that physical attacks aren't allowed, and impose a consequence like time out, lost privileges or extra chores.
- Be fair. Many younger children come running whenever their older sibling bothers them (or vice versa). If the parent constantly takes the side of one and gets mad at the other, one may become dependent while the other is constantly made to feel like a bully. Making an assumption about who is right or wrong can increase sibling rivalry. Parents often yell at the same child with words like, "Why do you have to hit her all the time?" Such responses reinforce children's aggressive tendencies. It's better to stay calm and reply, "I can see you're upset and need to be alone."
- Show understanding. If a child says her brother called her stupid, try saying, "That must have made you mad!" Empathy often can make a child feel better.

As always, children should be praised when they share, cooperate or play nicely together. Given the opportunity, children learn to get along with their siblings and are able to develop close relationships as they grow up.

## What To Do When Your Child Talks Back

“I can't wait to grow up so I can move out of this house!” a typical 10-year old declares while arguing about cleaning up his room. Sound familiar? Talking back is a normal part of growing up, but that doesn't make it any easier to deal with.

What can parents do to deal with a child who talks back? Parents' responses determine the outcome of their interaction with their children. When parents remain calm, their children are more likely to calm down too. However, parents often talk back, saying things like “Don't you talk back to me!” This inhibits communication and teaches the wrong lesson.

Parents can do many things to discourage talking back, including setting clear limits and explaining the behaviour that they expect of their children. Praising children when they behave well and don't talk back is a powerful way to reinforce good behaviour.

Kids learn by example; they will learn to handle their own strong emotions when they see their parents doing the same. An emotional parent might announce, “I'm so upset I need to be alone to calm down!” Using words teaches kids to take control of their anger.

It's important to consider the context in which children talk back and to identify patterns. For example, are children tired or overstimulated when they talk back? Parents also should be proactive in their interventions. If the hour or so after school seems to be a prime time for back talk, kids should be encouraged to take some downtime when they get home. Don't over-schedule children, and be sure to spend time with them.

Often, kids talk back because they want attention. When parents don't rise to the bait, they discourage back talk. A “non-response” is often more effective than engaging in a verbal battle. Giving children transition time between activities prepares kids for what's coming up and prevents back talk. As an example, telling kids that “Dinner will be served in 10 minutes” gives them time to think about the transition. Then, when dinner is ready, they will be less likely to resist and talk back.

Creative outlets also can help children express their anger. Here are a few ideas:

- Kids can draw a picture or bounce a ball to release their strong feelings.
- Sticker charts and special incentives often are effective in motivating kids to behave well. Reward children with extra playtime or a trip to the park. If the talking back persists, parents can impose a consequence, such as no TV that afternoon.
- When older children talk back, parents can encourage a dialogue by asking them how they think the problem can be resolved.
- Listening is a critical part of communicating, and it's important for parents to show their kids that they are listening. For example, a parent might say, “It sounds like you're frustrated with me,” to let the child know that the parent empathizes.
- The shows kids watch on TV can influence their talking back. Many popular TV shows with kids feature children who talk back, but in a situation comedy, the back talk is funny and has no consequences. Parents should actively monitor the shows their kids watch.

Remember that talking back is normal. It's up to parents to avoid power struggles and to help children change negative behaviours.

**Source: [www.chp.edu/parents](http://www.chp.edu/parents)**