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SCHOOLS OUT –SIBLINGS UNITE? OR FIGHT?

Schools out for the summers, brothers and sisters are united again. More time together at home – but are they at it again? Are you frustrated with sibling battles? Will this really last all summer?

It's probably not realistic to expect to entirely eliminate these fights. On the other hand, it is possible to reduce the frequency and intensity of fighting, tattling, and teasing among siblings.

A fight between siblings may be stopped for the moment. If not effectively handled, however, it often resumes again within minutes.

Think about why your children feel a need to fight. Are they trying to feel significant or do they need attention? Do they feel hurt and want to hurt back? Or perhaps they feel they are being treated unfairly and through fighting they will regain justice?

Sometimes you may reward the very behaviors you want to reduce. This happens when parents give too much attention to unwanted behaviors. Children repeat those behaviors that receive attention. Therefore, as much as possible parents need to ignore fighting, tattling, and teasing.

This is easier said than done. It may be necessary to leave the room to resist getting involved. Children want parents to take their side by blaming the other child so he/she will be punished. This gives a child a feeling of greater significance in the family.

In situations when fighting cannot be ignored, try to deal with it calmly and briefly. Do not take sides and treat both children exactly the same. Even if the confrontation involves a baby, give the presence of treating both children the same. For example, pick up the baby first and say to the baby, "You'll need to go to your room until you are ready to stop fighting". Then repeat the same message to the older child. In this way one child doesn't become the victim and the other the bully.

When older children are disruptive one solution may be to insist those fighting sit together until they give each other permission to get up. They must also develop a plan as to how they will play together without fighting. This distracts children enough that they begin to work on cooperation, rather than confrontation.

Sometimes a sense of humor can resolve battles. When children are fighting make it into a game. Say "Pig Pile" and playfully wrestle the children to the floor. This becomes an initiation for everyone to climb on the pile and see who ends up on the top. Fun provides a diversion from fighting.

Don't forget to catch your children being good. Whether they are getting along, playing cooperatively, or helping one another, reward this behavior with a

touch or brief compliment. Keep praise brief and low-key. The attention encourages the repeat of positive behaviors.

As a parent, set an example of being kind to others even when others may not be kind to you. Do nice things for others even when they have not done anything to deserve it. This example of kindness can become contagious and dramatically changes the atmosphere of the home. When people are nice, the response from others is more likely to be nice.

Dealing with siblings fighting is not easy. However, when children feel secure and important, there is less need to fight.