



The Mind Hub

By



Topic: How to Reduce Sibling Conflict at Home

If you have more than one child at home, you have likely heard the words:

“That’s not fair!”

“She started it!”

“He always gets his way!”

Sibling conflict is one of the most common concerns parents share. The good news? Conflict between siblings is normal, and when handled well, it can actually help children develop lifelong skills in communication, emotional regulation, and problem-solving.

This newsletter will help you understand why sibling conflict happens, what is typical, and most importantly, how to reduce the intensity and frequency of conflict at home.

Why Do Siblings Fight?

Sibling conflict usually stems from a few predictable factors:

1. Competition for Attention
 - a. Children are wired to seek connection and security from caregivers. If they perceive attention as limited, rivalry increases.
2. Developing Emotional Regulation
 - a. Young children (and even teens) are still learning how to manage frustration, jealousy, and disappointment.
3. Personality Differences
 - a. Some siblings are naturally more intense, sensitive, rigid, or competitive. These differences can clash.
4. Skill Gaps

a. Many conflicts are not about “bad behavior,” but about lagging skills in:

- Perspective-taking
- Impulse control
- Flexible thinking
- Negotiation

When we shift our lens from “They’re being difficult” to “They need skills,” our response changes.

What’s Normal and What’s Not?

Typical	Concerning Patterns
Occasional arguments	One child consistently dominating or scapegoated
Mild teasing	Frequent physical aggression
Short-lived physical scuffles in younger children	Ongoing hostility without repair
Emotional flare-ups that resolve	Fear between between siblings

If conflict is intense, frequent, or escalating, additional support may be helpful.

10 practical strategies to reduce sibling conflict

1. Avoid comparisons

- a. Even positive comparisons can fuel rivalry, instead of “Why can’t you be more organized like your sister?” Try “Let’s work on a system that helps you stay organized.” Each child deserves their own identity.

2. Schedule Individual Time
 - a. Even 10–15 minutes of predictable one-on-one time can reduce attention-seeking behaviours. Children who feel secure in their connection compete less.
3. Teach, Don't Just Referee
 - a. When conflict happens, avoid immediately deciding who is “right.” Instead, coach skills “what happened?”, “how did you feel?”, “what can you say instead?”. Over time, children internalise this language.
4. Establish Clear Family Rules for Conflict
 - a. Examples: no hitting, no name-calling, take a break if voices escalate, problems are solved with words. Consistency matters more than perfection.
5. Reduce “Fairness” Traps
 - a. Fair does not equal. Different ages and needs require different response. You may say “in our family, everyone gets what they need, and that may look different”.
6. Separate When Needed
 - a. Some siblings need structured space e.g., separate homework areas, clear boundaries around shared items. Prevention reduces flare-ups.
7. Demonstrate Calm Conflict Resolution
 - a. Children learn more from what we do than what we say. If adults yell to stop yelling, the lesson is lost. Demonstrating calm problem-solving teaches far more than lectures.
8. Notice Positive Interactions
 - a. Parents often intervene during negative moments but overlook cooperation. Positive reinforcement strengthens prosocial behavior.

What to do in the moment of conflict

- Stay neutral and calm
 - Separate if safety is concerned
 - Allow cooling-off time
 - Guide reflection once emotions settle
 - Avoid long lectures during heightened emotions.
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❖ **FAQs**

1. *Q. Is sibling rivalry normal?*

A. Yes. Conflict is a natural part of growing up with siblings. It provides opportunities to learn negotiation, compromise, and emotional regulation. The goal is not zero conflict, it is healthier conflict.

2. *Q. Should parents always step in?*

A. Not always. If the conflict is mild and both children are safe, allowing them to attempt resolution builds skills. Step in when there is aggression, power imbalance, or escalating emotions.

3. *Q. How do we handle constant “That’s not fair!” complaints?*

A. Validate feelings without changing boundaries. “I hear that this feels unfair. It’s hard when things feel different.” Then calmly restate the expectation.

4. *Q. Does birth order really matter?*

A. Birth order can influence personality and family roles, but it does not determine behaviour. Family dynamics, temperament, and parenting responses all play a role.

5. *Q. What if one child is always the aggressor?*

- A. Look beneath the behaviour. Aggression may signal unmet needs, jealousy, difficulty with impulse control, or lagging emotional skills. Address patterns directly and consistently.
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Final Thoughts

Sibling relationships are often the longest relationships children will have in their lifetime. While conflict is inevitable, it does not have to define the relationship.

With consistent boundaries, emotional coaching, and intentional connection, sibling conflict can shift from chaotic battles to meaningful opportunities for growth.

As caregivers, we cannot eliminate disagreements — but we can teach the skills that transform them.

If you have any concerns about your child's stress levels or would like further resources, don't hesitate to reach out to the school psychologist.

- The Mind Hub, by Marina Stavrou

