

Secrets to Sibling Bliss
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Well, the kids have been out of school for several weeks now, and perhaps the little darlings are beginning to get on each other's nerves, as well as yours. The excitement of vacation may have worn off, and you may find that your home is becoming a bit of a battleground, especially over the small, dumb stuff that children are so fond of bickering about. Why? Well, for one thing, they may have lots of time on their hands and sibling teasing and fighting tends to be the sport of childhood—engaging, entertaining (until someone gets hurt) and time consuming. You, on the other hand, may have lots of things to do and would desperately like to tone down the name-calling, bickering and general tension between the kids. Here are some tips that I've personally used with my own two kids while they were growing up, and, well, we've all survived!

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SQUABBLE SCENARIO #1
Backseat brawl

Squelch it with: "Speak up, kids! It's time to go on the record!"

Put an end to petty problems *without* pulling over to the side of the road by getting those gripes on tape. Stash a mini-recorder and turn it on when the he-did-this/she-did-that's get out of hand. When kids know they're being recorded for posterity—or parental review—they'll pipe down pretty quickly, says Peters, who used this trick on her own children.

SQUABBLE SCENARIO #2
Toy tussle

Squelch it with: "Time-out for the toy!"

It's a law of childhood: Put two kids in a room with 200 toys, and they will fight over *the one*. Instead of enforcing separate time-outs for the squallers, place the *toy* in solitary confinement. Five minutes should be enough for your tussling tots to feel the plaything's absence (or forget about it altogether!). If they want their playing privileges back, they'll band together to bail out the banished toy. And once they learn that rows means instant removal, they'll keep their quarrels quiet and work them out on their own.

SQUABBLE SCENARIO #3
It's-my-turn mania

Squelch it with: "Sounds like it's *my* turn...to spin the wheel."

You name it, kids fight over it—who picks the TV show, who gets to ride in the front seat...Steer clear of sulk-inducing “unfair” decisions by setting up a name wheel, advises Peters. Raid a board game like Chutes and Ladders for the spinner, write the kids’ names on it and post it on the fridge so you (or they!) can resolve spats with a quick spin.

SQUABBLE SCENARIO #4

Play-date pestering

Squelch it with: “Come and get it!”

When Little Sis can’t leave Big Bro and his buddy alone and tiny tempers flare, break up the brawl by treating everyone to a delicious distraction. Pull out Popsicles or make a bag of microwave popcorn to lure them away from the squabble scene. Your little wanna-be will feel like she’s getting some together time with the big boys, and all the slurping or munching will keep their mouths too busy to bicker. After the break, set up your young one with a special activity of her own (break-and-bake cookies, maybe?) so the play-date partners can peacefully return to their private party.”

Kids still bickering? Consider using the following parenting tips, techniques and tactics taken from my book, “*Laying Down the Law*”:

- **Teach your kids communication skills.** To best help your family with sibling squabbles try to teach your children to communicate their complaints, gripes and grumps about each other appropriately. To help avoid miscommunication consider the following:
 - Acknowledge the feelings that the kids are expressing.
 - Help them to label feelings accurately.
 - Teach them to create compromises or other actions that will resolve the problems.
 - Set guidelines for future behavior when the conflict occurs again.

- **Be prepared to use a demerit system.** If the kids continue to be unreasonable and you see that miscommunication is not the problem consider using a behavior management program. Include loss of privileges and possessions as well as the ability to earn rewards in your system.
- **Realize that sibling squabbles are normal.** Most kids fight, tease and even become aggressive with brothers or sisters.
- **Allowing is encouraging.** Realize that if you let a lot of this nonsense go on, you are actually encouraging the battles.
- **Don't be consistently inconsistent.** If you say that you will be giving a negative consequence for bickering—do it and don't back down!
- **Don't play judge and jury.** Try to catch yourself asking the kids “who started it?” It really doesn't matter and they probably will blame each other, so what's the point? Just give all of the involved parties a bad point and move on!
- **Try not to compare the kids.** Children are always on the lookout for your “favorite”, and even though you love them the same, you probably like different things about each of the kids. Try to compliment when deserved and direct constructive criticism to the action, not the child.