

Handling conflicts between children

1. Put them in the same boat.

When children have a conflict, most parents want to punish the “guilty” child. However, when you blame or punish one child, you teach the other child how to get their friend or sibling into trouble. They may try it again in other situations. This is known as “playing the victim”. A better way is to put both children “in the same boat”. This means that they float or sink together. For example, you can say: “either play without fighting or you will have to play in separate rooms. You decide.”

2. Remind them of the rules (or make a new one).

Many playtime situations will already have rules that you can remind children to follow. If there’s no rule that covers your child’s conflict, you can make one. Rules let the children know what’s OK and what’s not. If they break the rule, remind them once. Then give them a choice and a consequence. For example, you can say, “the rule is no hitting to solve problems. Either play without hitting or play in separate rooms.”

3. Help them learn to solve the problem.

If the children are in a conflict, you acknowledge the problem and ask them how they can solve it. Suggest a possible solution and maybe you can get them to agree to this and make it a rule. If not, then put them in the same boat and make a new rule about the children working out the problem without fighting or else take the toy away. Leave it up to the children to take the final step and solve the problem. That’s how they’ll learn. Remember, if they break the rule, you need to follow through with the consequence or they won’t take you seriously the next time.