

# Should I Intervene?

Most siblings fight. Most parents interfere in ways that increase competition and the need to fight. When parents interfere, they may stop the fight for the moment, but they feel frustrated because the kids are fighting again two minutes later. It is important to deal with the belief behind the behavior as well as the behavior. Are kids symbolically fighting for their place in the family, because they think they have to win to be significant? Or do they feel hurt and want to hurt back? Or do they feel they are being treated unfairly and that fighting is the only way to gain justice? We need to help children change their mistake beliefs about belonging and significance and teach them alternatives to fighting.



## Suggestions:

1. Do not take sides. This reinforces the belief about the need to compete. Treat children exactly the same—as in many of the following suggestions.
2. Say, "You can both go to separate rooms until you are ready to stop fighting." This can serve as a cooling-off period when fights get out of hand. Tell them they can come out and try again when they are ready.
3. Give both of them a choice. "You can stop fighting or else go outside to fight. If you choose to fight, I don't want to listen to it."
4. When a baby is involved, pick up the baby first and say to the baby, in front of the older child, "You'll need to go to your room until you are ready to stop fighting." Then take the older child by the hand and repeat the same message. It may seem ridiculous to put an innocent baby in her room for fighting. However, it's important to treat children the same, so you don't train one to be a victim and the other to be a bully. It can be comforting to kids if you let them fight while you sit quietly nearby, trusting that they can work it out without involving you. (This is a tough one because it is hard for parents to avoid getting hooked.)
5. If kids are fighting over a toy, remove the toy and let the kids know they can have it back when they are ready to play with it instead of fight over it.
6. Sometimes kids' fights are a way to play with each other. Think of them as cute little bear cubs.
7. Put all the fighters on a couch and tell them they have to stay there until they give each other permission to get off the couch and try again. This distracts them to work on cooperation instead of fighting.
8. Send those with the conflict to a room with the instructions that they can come out as soon as they have worked out a solution.
9. Leave the room. Believe it or not, a major reason kids fight is to get you involved. Kids want you to take their side by blaming and punishing the other child. Then they can feel important.
10. Interrupt the fight to ask if one of the participants would be willing to put the problem on the family-meeting agenda to work on a solution. If real danger is imminent (such as a child about to throw a rock at another child), keep your mouth shut and act. Move quickly to stop the rock throwing. Then use any of the other approaches.
11. Use a sense of humor and play Pig Pile. When you see your kids fighting, wrestle them to the floor and say, "Pig Pile." This is an invitation for everyone to playfully climb on the pile and see who can end up on top. This can become a fondly remembered family tradition.