

# DR. BERTIE'S PARENTING NEWSLETTER

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*Each month I invite parents to submit a question or topic that they want to see featured in my free newsletter, and I will pick one of these to address. To ask a question, suggest a topic, or subscribe, write to [askdrbertie@gmail.com](mailto:askdrbertie@gmail.com). For other services, write to [drbertiewai@gmail.com](mailto:drbertiewai@gmail.com).*

## PAVING THE WAY TO SIBLING HARMONY: PROMOTING CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING (III)

The last issue focused on how to promote EQ during conflicts. In this issue we will explore how to tap into your children's creative problem solving skills during sibling conflicts. Let's continue with the scenario from July's newsletter.

Mum: "So, Sam, you were building a tall tower, like this tall, and Jack knocked it down. **You were upset and so you hit him.** (Connecting emotion with behavior for your child.) Is that right?"  
Sam: "Yeah."

Mum: "OK, I see. Jack, what happened?"  
Jack: "I wanted to play too. Sam said I was clumsy and wouldn't let me play."  
Mum: "So you were **disappointed** that Sam wouldn't let you play, and you were **hurt** that he said you were clumsy, and so you knocked down his tower. Is that right?" (expanding emotional vocabulary)

### \*\*\*What Some Parents Tend To Do\*\*\*

Now, at this point, parents might be tempted to go into the director mode, and say something along this line:

"Sam, you should not hit your brother. Jack is younger than you, and so you need to coach and protect him. You

are the bigger brother. We need to share our toys and forgive."

Parents always have the best intentions, and there are valuable lessons that this mum is trying to teach here: the importance of sharing, forgiveness, and taking care of our younger siblings. These are important values that we want to impart on the next generation.

If you happen to have kids who are ready to comply to reason, and this kind of straight-forward directives work in your family ("work" in the sense that you don't find yourself repeating the same set of instructions every time a fight breaks out, which happens regularly), you probably won't be reading this newsletter because sibling fights are less likely an issue in your family. For those of us with kids where this kind of rational directives don't work very well, we might want to try a different route.

### \*\*\*Why Top-Down Instructions Don't Work\*\*\*

Directives don't always work because they take away the sense of agency and choice that our children need. So, instead of prescribing directions and

expecting compliance, we can try encouraging them to solve the problems themselves. Our role is a listener, a prompter, and a guide.

### \*\*\*A New Strategy\*\*\*

Mum: "I see. So Sam doesn't want his tower to be knocked down by Jack, and Jack wants to be included. (Mum communicates she gets what her kids want.) I see why you would want that (Mum validates her kids' needs). I wonder what we can do so you both get what you want. (Mum encourages creative problem solving in her kids.)"

Sam might say: "Jack needs to ask me for permission first. And then I'll tell Jack where to go and what to do."

Mum: "What a good start! Jack, what do you think?"

If your children are too young to come up with ideas, parents can provide some prompts along these lines:

"Sam, what can Jack do to avoid knocking down your tower?"

"Jack, what can you do to protect Sam's tower so that he will want to include you in his play?"

\*\*Remember to model creativity yourself!!\*\*