

DR. BERTIE'S PARENTING NEWSLETTER

JULY 2016, ISSUE 4

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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. For other services, write to drbertiewai@gmail.com.

PAVING THE WAY TO SIBLING HARMONY: HOW TO PROMOTE EQ DURING CONFLICTS (II)

The last issue was about how to conflict-proof sibling relationships before and when the new baby arrives. This issue focuses on how to promote and restore harmony between siblings, especially when fights break out.

I) Day-to-day Maintenance Tips

- If possible, protect each child's own private space (e.g., their own work, play, resting space), and possessions (e.g., own toys, stationary, clothes). Encourage sharing, but don't insist that they have to share *everything*.
- Give them special assignments where they are to help each other out, followed by a show of appreciation and praise. You can cultivate this very early on: e.g., when the baby is still young, invite the older sibling to join you in caring for the baby—washing, feeding, dressing, pushing the stroller, etc. If the older sibling is too young to offer help, invite them to watch and talk them through the process so that they feel they are part of the bonding experience.
- Don't compare to motivate good behavior. Comments like "why can't you be more like your brother" hurt your relationship with your child as well as the sibling relationship.

II) What To Do During Conflicts

I always encourage parents to turn challenges into teaching moments. The same goes with sibling arguments, which offer golden opportunities to teach EQ skills.

****A fight might start out like this:**
Sam is building a Lego tower. Jack wants to join Sam. Sam refuses, saying Jack is clumsy. Jack feels rejected and hurt, and knocks down Sam's tower. Sam gets upset and hits Jack. Jack cries.**
Often, parents' first response is "Stop! Who started it this time?" Then parents go into punishment or scolding. But notice that both kids have done something inappropriate. Sam should not have hit Jack, and Jack should not have destroyed Sam's tower. Singling one child out for punishment will feel unfair. Punishing both might stop them for a short while, but you might find yourself and them in the same situation very soon.

A better strategy? Use this as a golden opportunity to teach EQ!

Mum: "You both look very **upset**." (Naming emotions) "**What just happened?**" (Asked in an understanding manner. Modeling empathy and showing

an interest in both kids' experiences.)

Jack: "Sam hit me."

Sam: "Jack knocked down my tower. He did it on purpose."

Mum: "OK. Our family rule is no hitting (looking at Sam), and no rude, hurtful behavior (looking at Jack)."

Mum: "But I know you two are upset for a reason. Tell me what happened."

Sam: "I was building a tower. It was very tall. Like this tall. Jack knocked it down. On purpose."

Jack: "I wanted to play too. Sam wouldn't let me."

Mum: "**Hold on Jack. Wait for your turn.** I am talking to Sam now." (Setting limits and maintaining structure.)

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)

--To Continue Next Month--