

How to Respond to Sibling Conflict:



The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changes to our routines that see us spending more time with our family members than usual. With this extra time together, sibling conflict may follow. It is normal for siblings to fight over a number of things such as control over the TV, situations that are deemed unfair, possessions, console games, and caregiver attention etc.

It is important to remember that sibling interaction is an essential learning tool. Through sibling relationships, young people learn how to regulate their emotions and interact with others.

Sibling fighting can help children learn important life skills, like how to:

- Solve problems and resolve conflicts
- Treat others with empathy
- Deal with different opinions
- Compromise and negotiate.

That being said, it can be stressful for both caregivers and young people. The best way we can help our kids through conflict is to share our calm, not join the chaos. It is perfectly normal for our teens to feel frustrated, upset or angry as these are feelings that we all experience. However, it is important that our teens learn how to express these feelings effectively and safely.

Below are some practical strategies that you can try at home:

- Remember that anger is not 'bad'; it is an expression of need.
- Support them in naming their feelings and validating them ie. *I can see you're feeling really frustrated right now and I understand why.*
- Once emotions are less intense, help them in identifying the problem and seeing each other's perspective one at a time, without interruption and without taking sides ie. *Jordan it sounds like you're really frustrated with Sarah because she keeps taking your things without asking. And Sarah I know that it is frustrating when you do ask to borrow something from Jordan and he constantly says no.*

- Try to focus on what the issue is rather than on who started the conflict or who said what.
- Encourage them to find a fair and practical solution to the problem which may involve a compromise.
- Help them take ownership over the resolution by contributing their own ideas to resolve the problem ie. *What do you think we could do to avoid this conflict in the future?*
- Reinforce positive outcomes with praise and track how they came to these positive outcomes for future occasions.

Should the conflict become verbally or physically violent, step-in to ensure safety and minimise long-term impacts to the relationship and wellbeing of your kids.

If you or your teen are in need of support, please contact one of the following services:

- Lifeline: **13 11 14** (cost of a local call, 24 hours)
- Kids Help Line: **1800 55 1800** (free call from a land line, 24 hours)
- Suicide Call Back Service: **1300 659 467** (free call support service for people at risk of suicide, their carers and those bereaved by suicide)
- Headspace: **1800 367 968**
- Salvo Care Line (Salvation Army): **1300 36 36 22**
- SANE Helpline: **1800 18 SANE (7263)**
- Parent Line: **13 22 89**
- Suicide Prevention Foundation (24/7): **1800 HOLDON (1800 465 366)**
- Safe Steps **1800 015 188**
- 1800Respect **1800 737 732**

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