

JOURNAL PROMPTS

As you listen to this week's audio.

What were my biggest take-aways from this audio on Siblings?

1.

2.

3.

What is a realistic action step for me to take now to help my children get along better?

GOING DEEPER

Melting the Chip on Your Child's Shoulder

When children resist repair with their siblings, it's almost always because they're still angry. That anger is covering up hurt or fear, often long-standing. Usually, the child feels hurt that their own needs aren't being met, or worries that the parent loves the other child more. Because the child can't bear to let himself feel his envy, grief and fear, he has to hang onto that anger that he carries toward his sibling. That keeps him defended against the more vulnerable, scary feelings he doesn't want to feel.

So that chip on your child's shoulder defends against pain. To melt it, you'll need to use all the skills you've learned so far in this course.

1. **Connect with empathy and special time** to help your child feel safe.
2. **Use roughhousing to get laughter going**, which reduces the anxiety and fear the child is carrying, so their tears are more accessible.
3. **Listen to your child's anger.** It won't dissipate until your child feels heard.

Then, during altercations and upsets:

1. **Self-regulate** so you don't leap to attack the perpetrator. (That would just reinforce the child's resentment.)
2. **Create safety** with your empathy and touch.
3. **Take responsibility**, which takes your child off the defensive. (*"I wish I had been here to help."*)
4. **Use the immediate issue to speak to the child's larger hurt.** (*"Sometimes it seems you have to share everything with your sister....you even have to share your parents!"*)

This won't be an overnight fix, but don't give up. Over time, you'll see your child soften.

Do you think your child has a "chip on their shoulder" toward their sibling?

What's your plan to melt that chip? (Use additional paper if necessary.)

PRACTICE WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Print and post the instructions below for intervening in a sibling fight. Sometime this week, your children will give you an opportunity to practice these skills by disagreeing with each other. Do your best to follow this process. Observe how your children react.

PRINT OUT AND TAPE TO YOUR REFRIGERATOR!

Intervening in a sibling fight

1. Get between your kids to separate them and prevent further violence.

“Whoa! Stop!” Hold out your hand at chest level to keep them from advancing.

2. Help both kids feel safer so they can stop attacking. Breathe deeply and use a calm voice. Touch each child so they feel connected.

3. If a child is hurt, comfort that child. Administer comfort, bandage, ice, empathy. If the child is hurt too badly for you to even be nice to the aggressor, take the wounded child into the bathroom or another room, so you aren't tempted to shout at the other child. If you can matter-of-factly involve the aggressor (*“Ooh, this must hurt. Quick, Lucas, get the ice pack!”*), you'll help him shift from “bad kid who hurt his sibling” to “helpful kid who repairs his mistakes and helps heal his sibling.” That's an invaluable shift if you want to prevent more hitting in the future.

4. Depending on how upset the kids are, you may want to separate them for a cooling off period. But don't send them to their rooms, which will make them feel less safe. Your goal is to teach them some self-calming techniques so they can learn to shift out of an upset state and re-regulate themselves when life doesn't go their way. Say *“I see how mad you both are. I want to hear what's upsetting you. Let's cool off for a few*

minutes so we can talk. Lucas, please sit on the couch. Charles, please come sit on this chair. Now, let's take three deep breaths together....Breathe deep....Now blow out all those angries...Like blowing out candles."

5. Bring the children together and put an arm around each so when you listen to the one who's talking, the other still feels connected to you.

6. Give each child a chance to speak and reflect back what you heard.

Use your skills to listen, empathize and interpret.

"Lucas, you hit him because he broke your fire truck ladder?...You were so upset!"

"Charles, you didn't mean to break it?...You just wanted to see it?"

7. Re-state family rules.

"No hitting! Hitting hurts."

8. Resist siding with either child, even when you think one is clearly right.

Even if one was hurt. Your child knows that hurting his sibling was wrong, and you've just re-stated it.

9. Coach each child to tell the other how he feels or what he wants.

"Sounds like you want to tell your brother -- 'Don't hit me!'"

"Sounds like you want to tell your brother that when he wants to use your fire truck, he needs to ask you?"

10. If one child attacks the other, redirect him to express how he feels, not what he thinks of the other child.

“You Stupidhead, Charles!”

“Lucas, tell your brother how you feel and what you need —not what you think about him right now.”

“I need you to ask before you take my truck! Now the ladder is broken! I feel sad!”

11. Coach each child to restate how the other one feels.

“What did you hear your brother say?”

12. Raise the possibility of repair.

“You both got pretty upset. Brothers are for loving, not for hurting. What could you do to make things better?”

When there’s still a problem to be solved, coach kids to use their problem-solving skills.

1. Validate how big the problem feels to your children.

“Lucas’s fire truck is broken. This is a tough problem.”

2. Express confidence that the problem can be solved.

“I know you two can work this out.”

3. Help the children brainstorm a mutually agreeable solution.

4. State the solution. *“Okay, so Charles agrees that he will help Lucas tape the ladder with duct tape to see if it can be fixed. And also Charles will let Lucas use his dump truck for a whole week. Is that right?”*

5. Shake hands all around as you restate the agreement and congratulate your children: *“You really listened to each other and worked hard to come up with an agreement that feels fair to both of you. You must feel so good inside. Wow!”*

Remember to write up the agreement afterwards, and post it, so you can all refer back to it and remind each other about what was agreed upon. Even before children can read, they regard written words as powerful. This also keeps you from being the keeper of the agreement, so the children take more responsibility for it.

REFLECTION AFTER PRACTICE

After you coach your children through a conflict, reflect on what happened and what you learned.

What were your children fighting about, at least on the surface?

Do you think there might be deeper reasons they were fighting? Do you have any ideas on what those reasons might be?

Were you able to calm yourself before you intervened? What helped you get calmer and what didn't help?

Did you feel you were able to "create safety" for both children? What helped and what didn't help?

Were you able to resist taking sides, and instead empathize with both children? What helped and what didn't help you with that?

How did each child respond?

Were you able to find the words to acknowledge both children's perspective and empathize? What did you say?

How did your children react?

How did you feel throughout this interaction?

What did you feel good about in this interaction?

What would you like to change about your intervention next time your children fight with each other?