

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Multiples share the closest of bonds and are often best buddies. Yet, there's no doubt that one of the most common ways they entertain each other is through fighting. A certain amount of bickering among multiples is healthy and may be done out of boredom or as a form of interacting instead of anger. Toddlers often bite, pull hair, or push each other when playing. They also may fight over a favorite toy since it's difficult for them to grasp the concept of sharing. "Mine" is a common first word heard by many parents of multiples.

As multiples grow older, fighting sometimes becomes more intense and occurs as a result of competition. Academic and physical abilities are often judged once multiples enter school. Constant comparisons can easily lead to rivalry between them. Parents should make an attempt to review each child's progress privately and point out their individual strengths. Lack of privacy may also cause bickering among older multiples. They may need both a physical and psychological break from each other. If possible, parents should schedule separate activities for each multiple in order to provide individual space and reduce conflicts.

Parents of multiples are often frustrated by the high level of arguing that takes place among their children. Even though parents may view fighting as a nuisance, arguing helps children develop problem solving techniques. Most of the time, it's best for parents not to interfere with fighting unless one of their children is in physical danger. Multiples need to learn how to resolve conflicts by themselves which will help them develop better social skills. Paying too much attention to fighting can also reinforce the behavior. Yet, there are times when fighting gets out of hand and parents must intervene. They can help their children explore different ways of handling situations and make them more sensitive to each other's feelings.

There are several ways in which parents can help minimize conflict between multiples. First of all, parents need to set limits and define behavior which is acceptable. Good behavior should be reinforced with positive comments such as, "You're playing so nicely together!" Time-out or deprivation of privileges can be used to curb aggressive behavior. However, time-out is ineffective when the offender is entertained by his or her sibling which is often the case with multiples. Sometimes it's just easier for parents to eliminate the source of conflict. For example, it may be wise to duplicate favorite toys for toddler multiples since they have difficulty understanding how to share.

Identifying the actual cause of conflict should also help alleviate some of the bickering. Parents must encourage their children to talk about their feelings in order to determine the root of the problem. Sometimes a struggle for dominance is a mask for feelings of insecurity or anger. It's important that parents be sympathetic and reassure their children while encouraging them to find acceptable ways of expressing their emotions.

Some parents wonder if their multiples will ever get along even though they realize that it's normal for siblings to fight. Multiples have even more reasons to argue since they've been competing for space and position even before they were born. They've had to share their parents from day one while waiting their turn to be fed and picked up. They are also constantly being compared by family members, teachers, friends and strangers. Yet, most multiples remain best friends into adulthood despite all of these factors. Perhaps in the end, conflict only serves to strengthen the bond between them.

Sources:

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First published March 1998 in "The Duet", Bucks-Mont Mothers of Multiples. All rights reserved to the publication and the author.