

BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL PRESENTS: PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC

Special Thoughts on Raising Kids

Fighting and Bickering

Childhood fights. They can be tough on parents as well as on children. Luckily, there are guidelines on how fights should be handled most of the time.

Guideline 1:

Protect if life and limb are in danger—otherwise expect the children to handle it- The first guideline is the toughest. When we hear children fighting, we naturally want to intervene. In some cases, if we are teachers, we have a legal responsibility to intervene whether or not it is necessary. However, if possible, it's best to put the problem on the children. When one child tattles on another, it's best to say, "Why are you telling me?" Or, on seeing a fight, sometimes it works to say, dryly, "You two ought to form a committee." Or, "Please settle it somewhere else where I won't see it or hear it."

Guideline 2:

Help children to problem solve their fights- Children need help in identifying their feelings. Were they feeling mad, sad, frustrated or left out? After identifying their feelings, they can then identify different ways to handle them. We can use modeling at this point: "If I hit Mr. Jackson when I feel frustrated, I probably won't be as happy as I am handling it in another way. How do you think you could handle your problem in another way?"

Guideline 3:

"Use "I-messages"- When we are around youngsters who fight, they must understand we are going to take care of ourselves rather than try and take care of them. Then, if we do need to ask the children to leave or quit

playing together, they are not resentful. They would be resentful if they thought we were doing it for their own good. If we do it for our good, they accept it. It's almost magic. Adults giving "I-messages" might say: "Fights make me nervous," or "hey, have you two had your rabies shots?" or "Hey, guys, this stuff hassles my eyeballs." I want to stress here the importance of humor.

Guideline 4:

Give consequences only if a difficult child has trouble dealing with a contract for no fights- A therapist tells the story of Jake who came to the office with his professional foster parent. Jake had been a terror when he arrived in the foster care program three weeks earlier. Now his fighting had almost stopped. When the therapist asked Jake about this, he said, "Well, I hate doing the chores. When I fight, my mom says it drains energy from the family. But when I scrub the walls, it puts energy back into the family." Jake, I might note, said this without any anger toward his foster parents. As he told this, he looked up at his mother, with the dawning of love, and smiled.

These consequences were meted out to take care of the mother, not to take care of Jake. Further, his mother did not have to tell Jake what to do. She didn't have to say, "Stop fighting!" Such orders seldom work on children like Jake. Instead, his wonderful parents could see what was happening, stop Jake, and say in a loving way, "Jake, I feel an energy drain coming." Jake changed quickly!

Let the Children Solve the Problem - Avoid Being Used As a Judge or Referee