

# ***BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL***

***PRESENTS:***

## ***PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC***

***Special Thoughts on Raising Kids***

### **Sibling Rivalry**

It never seems to fail. We can buy our children enough toys to start their own store, but when push comes to shove, one specific toy becomes the heart's desire of both of them. They tug and shove and shriek. They won't back down no matter what. It's a maddening phenomenon.

Normal parents, who have normal children, have children who fight. Sibling rivalry is a part of growing up. The thing to remember about dealing with our children's fights is to keep out of them. Expect them to handle it themselves. This may be the toughest parenting principle to follow, because children desperately want our intervention. In fact, our intervention makes it safe for them to fight. They know we'll step in before anyone gets hurt, so they have no qualms about putting up their dukes.

Our involvement in these spats should include only the location of the fight - somewhere away from us. As soon as the bickering starts to invade our ears, our youngsters are out of here. "Hey, guys, take it outside," is an effective way of dealing with squabbles.

Of course, we must step in if life and limb are in danger. If a big child continually terrorizes a small child - showing relentless anger toward him or her - then we need to stop it. Most of the time, however, we must remember that it takes two to tangle. Even the smallest and frailest child has ways to get to big brother or sister.

When the tongues have been stilled and fists unclenched, then and only then, do we counsel our children about fighting. Trying to reason with children who are emotionally upset is a waste of good air.

Helping our children solve their difficulties involves identifying their feelings. Were they feeling mad, sad, frustrated, left out, or something different? Why did they resort to angry words rather than playing nice? First, they need to identify their feelings, and second, they need to identify different ways of handling them.

We can use modeling at this point: "If I hit my boss, Mr. Jackson, when ever I felt frustrated, I probably would not be as happy as if I handled my frustration another way." The point is, we must identify with the child's feelings, and then help the child work out a new course of action. However, it may be necessary to provide very stubborn children with a significant learning opportunity.

Adult and child psychiatrist, Foster W. Cline, M.D., tells of a counseling episode with a little boy named Kurt who was an expert at terrorizing other children. His modus operandi was simple yet effective: He simply aimed for them on the playground and then mowed them down.

Two weeks after Kurt was placed in a good foster home, he and his foster Mom came in for an appointment with

Dr. Cline. The little lion had become a lamb. He gently held his foster Mom's hand. Foster asked, "Kurt, how's the fighting going these days?"

"Oh, I'm not fighting much anymore," Kurt said.

"Well, why not?" asked Foster.

"Oh, because I hate doing all the chores."

Not understanding, Foster gave the boy a quizzical look. Kurt, seeing the perplexed look, explained, "Dr. Cline, when I fight, my Mom says it drains energy from the family. But when I clean behind the refrigerator with a hand brush, that puts energy back into the family."

That explained it. In an untrained home, parents would have commanded Kurt to stop his behavior. They would have said, "Kurt, don't you beat up on other children or you'll regret it," and Kurt would have had his knees on the other child's arm before they finished the sentence. But the foster Mom had connected Kurt's behavior with a consequence. When Kurt's behavior deteriorated, she could look at him and say, "Kurt, honey, I feel an energy drain coming on," and Kurt would think, "Uh, oh, not that!" and there would be no fighting.

***Expect siblings to handle their own arguments themselves***