

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator

10 ways children draw parents into sibling conflict

Sibling fighting is common but not inevitable. Parents can become embroiled in sibling fighting by responding to some of the games children play.

Sometimes parents get drawn into sibling disputes when they don't involve them. Parents become embroiled in the conflict and help create the problem rather than solve it.

Children usually become quite adept at drawing their parents into disputes between siblings. Parents need to be aware of the following ten common ways children involve parents in their sibling disputes:

1. Beware the *teller of tales* because they can draw you into disputes you don't need to be in.

"Tell Tale children" tend to involve parents in fights and disputes when they don't need to be. Tales also invite parents to take sides, which may mean a fight stops momentarily. However it will begin again at another time as there may be lingering resentment about you taking sides.

2. Beware the *blame gamers* for it is never, ever their fault!

Some children will blame other siblings for wrong-doing but will rarely see their side in a dispute. It usually takes two or three to tango so make sure you point out their place in the dispute.

3. Beware the *tantrum-throwers* as they divert attention away from themselves.

Kids who throw a 'wobbly' when a sibling even looks at them in the wrong way have discovered a great way to keep mum or dad busy with them.

4. Beware of *children's tears* as they can make us feel pity rather than look at the whole story.

A child who comes to you with tears in her eyes and a tale of woe sure knows how to get their parents onside. Tears usually gain sympathy but sometimes the person who cries the loudest is the child who caused the dispute in the first place.

5. Beware of children who say that they *couldn't help* hitting, hurting or misbehaving.

Children always have a choice. They just choose the easy way or a way that suits them a lot of the time.

6. Beware of the child who is always, always *the victim*. Sometimes they revel in this role.

Some children, particularly youngest kids, love to play the victim in fights and arguments with their siblings. "He always picks on me" is their catchcry. Don't give these children too much attention and give

them some options about how they can keep away from their siblings if things look likely to 'cut up rough'.

7. Beware of the child who acts like the *deputy sheriff*, always giving orders and bossing others around. They can make life unpleasant at home.

First born boys can sometimes act like a parent's deputy and believe it is their job to keep peace on the 'family range'. They often use methods more akin to the 'wild west' than those they would learn in a negotiation skills workshop. Aggression and power is their preferred methodology. Keep a firm eye on these kids and don't put them in charge of the 'family range' too often.

8. Beware the donkey who *whines and whinges* about his siblings - "Hee Hawlways picks on me!"

Give them some ideas about how to deal with their siblings and refuse to be drawn by incessant whining. Like water torture, whining wears a person down after a while.

9. Beware children who *bring home poor attitudes and behaviours* that they learned at school or pre school.

You can tell sometimes what is happening in the schoolyard as children can bring home poor conflict resolution skills that they see in the schoolyard. 'We treat each other well in this family' is the message!

10. Beware of the *home environment* that uses power to resolve disputes and conflict.

Children will often reflect the ways that the significant adults in their family resolve conflict so make sure you use the same methods to sort out issues and disagreements with your partner that you want your children to adopt. Children tend to live what they see so make sure they see conciliation and compromise rather than bullying and power. It helps if they see assertiveness rather than aggression. And make sure they see you looking at both sides of the picture rather than your side all the time in disputes.

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