

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

Sometimes it helps just to know you're not alone. This month's topic falls into that category for me. The articles not only contain some great suggestions for how to combat sibling squabbling, but they also just add to my sense of "Oh, okay, it's not just my family." Do you have suggestions for how to combat sibling squabbling? Send them my way! I'd love to publish more ideas in future issues. Visit [forwardinchrist.net/submit](http://forwardinchrist.net/submit).

—Nicole Balza

## HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE SIBLING SQUABBLING?

"IT'S MINE!"

"Stop that!"

"Give it back!"

"Just leave me alone!"

"I don't want to play with you!"

Do these words ever fly out of your children's mouths? Since the beginning of time, siblings have squabbled. We see many examples in the Bible of siblings arguing, fighting, not getting along, and worse! I am sure several of those stories just popped into your head. I bet you can think of situations when you and your own siblings got into it or the times your children have struggled to get along. It seems to be unavoidable.

I distinctly remember one car trip (why is it always in the car?) when my siblings and I, who were not so young anymore, would not stop ripping on one another. After scoldings, reminders, and encouragement, my dad finally enlisted the quarter jar. We had to drop in a quarter each time we made a negative or sarcastic comment. By the end of that trip, we had enough money for a Dairy Queen stop on the way home.

Some of the jabs were in good fun, and this memory evokes smiles and laughter now as we reminisce—especially when we recall my sister dropping in an entire dollar and letting it rip! In those moments, my parents were working hard to teach us to get along, be kind, and not tear each other down, but they also recognized the value of diversion and having a little fun.

Maybe you've tried something like this or had your children wear one of Dad's giant T-shirts together until they could work it out. The shouts changed to giggles pretty quickly. Perhaps a separation or cool-off period is necessary. Each scenario is different and calls for varying

approaches. The humor approach can often diffuse the situation and even build bonds between siblings.

So why the sibling squabbles or rivalries? Some experts say a certain amount of this is natural and can even be a beneficial part of the family dynamic, teaching children to solve problems, grow, and mature. For most, family is our safe space. These are the people who love us unconditionally, so we know that no matter what, they'll love us and we'll love them.

### Since the beginning of time, siblings have squabbled.

But sin still creeps in. We cannot escape our innate desire to be right and aim to justify ourselves, even from little on. We can teach our children that as sinners—saints, bought by the blood of Christ, it's not who they are anymore. We can work to show our children the unique gifts they have from God. We can work to cultivate empathy and understanding along with setting boundaries. Most important, we share the truths of what Jesus has done for them. He alone justified them, declared them righteous, and adopted them as sons and daughters of an eternal and lasting family.

Will these things stop all the squabbles? I think you know the answer, but this too shall pass. Continue to point your children to our heavenly Father and his love for each of his children—even their siblings.



Amanda Berg and her husband, Mike, are raising three daughters. Amanda is the early childhood ministry director at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

I REMEMBER the conversation well.

It had been a long stretch of a school break, and my four children had been together a lot. I recall sitting around our kitchen table as they tried to decide what to do with yet another afternoon stretching before them. The conversation quickly turned from a casual chat to an intense discussion to an argument resulting in hurt feelings and frustration. When asked, I always tell people that these four get along 95 percent of the time, but it's the other 5 percent that tries my patience to no end.

Everything in me wanted to scream, to yell at the top of my lungs a reminder of how much they love each other and how blessed they are that God has given them built-in friends in their siblings. I breathed deeply and prayed for wisdom, for words that would be effective and long-lasting.

With self-control that only could've come from the Spirit, I turned to my children and posed a question: "How could all of the world's problems be solved?"

They looked at me with puzzled expressions and tried a few answers, humoring me with good thoughts. Yet none were exactly what I was getting at.

I then asked, "What did Jesus say were the two greatest commandments?" Flashes of recognition passed across their faces: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

We then identified what they viewed as some of the world's greatest problems— various crimes, war, broken families—quickly discovering that when boiled down, the problems all stemmed from a lack of love for God and one another. In other words, love of self. Sin.

## “How could all of the world’s problems be solved?”

Many times since that summer day I've stopped and asked my children: "How could all of the world's problems be solved?" And each time, we go back to those words of Jesus.

Yes, the Scriptures that encompass the gospel and all God has done to save us are important—without them our faith would mean nothing. We talk about these truths often with our children too.

Yet in our mission to spread this gospel, it's important to remember that the gospel will never be heard by others if we do not have love: first and foremost, love for God above all things and, second, love for those he created around us.



*Melissa Anne Kreuser is a Christian writer and speaker. She, her husband, Mike, and their four children are members at Morning Star, Jackson, Wisconsin.*

## ONE WAY TO HANDLE SIBLING SQUABBLING

When children are fighting, it usually does not work to yell at them to stop. It's also not effective trying to figure out who started it. Both parties see the event with a bias. What does work is telling them to stop fighting and play nicely and that if they choose to continue fighting, they will be forced to take a time-out: standing in a corner, sitting on a "thinking" chair, or going to their rooms. When the time-out is over, review the situation, tell your children they're forgiven, and let life return to normal.

*John Juern, taken from Patient Parenting: Raising Your Kids in the Shadow of the Cross, available from Northwestern Publishing House, [nph.net](http://nph.net).*



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