

3 Mistakes That Make Sibling Fights Worse (And What to Do Instead)



A quick-start guide to calmer kids, fewer arguments, and a more peaceful home

Alex Anderson-Kahl, Ed.S, NCSP
Founder of Raise Strong

Because strong kids start with supported parents.

You are not imagining it.

Sibling fights can drain your energy fast.

When both kids are upset, the noise, tension, and pressure to fix things can feel overwhelming. Many parents tell me they react before they have time to think, then feel guilty afterward.

Here is the truth:

You are not failing. You are human. And there is a gentler way forward.

Sibling conflict is normal. It is not a sign that something is wrong. It is a sign that your children are still learning lifelong skills like emotional regulation, communication, flexibility, empathy, and sharing space. These skills grow slowly over time.

The good news is that you can guide your kids in ways that build connection instead of tension.

This guide is grounded in the psychology of emotional safety, polyvagal theory, and connection based parenting. These are the same principles at the heart of Raise Strong, where calm creates connection and supported parents raise strong kids.

Let's start with three small shifts that make a big difference.

Mistake 1: Jumping in too fast

When voices rise or bodies get tense, your instinct is to step in immediately. You want the fighting to stop. You want everyone safe. And you want peace back in your home.

But jumping in too quickly usually makes things louder, faster, and more overwhelming.

Kids who are already dysregulated feel interrupted or pressured when an adult rushes in. Their bodies stay on high alert, and the conflict grows instead of settling.

This is not defiance. It is biology. Their nervous systems do not feel safe yet.

What to do instead: Pause for three seconds

A short pause has powerful effects. It:

- Helps you regulate your own nervous system
- Shows your kids that you are calm
- Interrupts the escalation cycle
- Makes space for everyone to breathe
- Sets a tone of safety

Then offer a grounding phrase like:

“I am here. Let’s slow down for a moment.”

This kind of steady presence helps your child shift from reactivity toward connection. Their bodies respond to your calm long before they respond to your words.

Try this today

Before stepping in, place one hand on your heart or take a slow inhale through your nose. That single breath changes the direction of the moment.

Bottom Line:

Your calm teaches your kids what safety feels like.

Kids who feel safe fight less and reconnect more easily.

Mistake 2: Trying to figure out who started it

When you hear fighting, it makes sense to try to understand the story. You want fairness. You want clarity. You want to teach accountability.

But during conflict, questions like:

- “What happened”
- “Why did you do that”
- “Who started it”

almost always intensify the storm.

Kids who are emotionally overwhelmed cannot reflect clearly. Their emotional brain is driving, and logic is unavailable. So they defend, blame, and argue harder.

You end up in referee mode, which leaves everyone frustrated.

What to do instead: Reflect the feeling, not the facts

Try offering emotional safety first. It sounds like:

“It looks like everyone is upset. I will help us slow down.”

or

“This feels big for both of you. Let’s take a moment.”

When kids feel seen, their bodies settle. When they feel interrogated, they escalate.

This is connection before correction in action.

Try this today

For the first thirty seconds of any sibling conflict, avoid questions. Focus on presence and tone. Your steadiness is what calms the moment.

Bottom line

Connection is what stops the fight.

Clarity comes naturally once everyone feels grounded again.

Mistake 3: Forcing apologies before kids are ready

You want your children to grow into kind, empathetic people. So when one child hurts another, it feels natural to say:

“Tell your sister you are sorry.”

But if a child is still overwhelmed, embarrassed, or upset, a forced apology does not build empathy. It teaches performance, not understanding.

A dysregulated child cannot access remorse. Their thinking brain is temporarily offline.

What to do instead: Calm first, repair second

Once everyone feels settled, guide them through a simple three step repair process.

The repair routine

1. **Name the moment** in a neutral way
“Something happened that hurt feelings. Let’s talk about it.”
2. **Reflect feelings** with gentle curiosity
“I wonder if you felt frustrated.”
“It seemed like you felt left out.”
3. **Choose a repair action**
A check in
A kind gesture
A shared activity
A sincere “I am sorry” when they are emotionally ready

This approach teaches emotional responsibility and genuine empathy. It is far more effective at reducing conflict over time.

Try this today

After a conflict, ask:

“What would help us feel connected again?”

Kids often choose repairs that are simple and surprisingly thoughtful.

Bottom line

Empathy grows in safety, not pressure.

Ready for kids who actually get along

You now know three powerful shifts that make sibling fights shorter, smoother, and less stressful. Imagine having a clear plan for those heated moments, one that keeps you calm and helps your kids work through conflict instead of repeating it.

You can have that plan.

Raising Siblings Who Actually Get Along

A practical, brain based workshop for busy parents

Inside the workshop, you will learn:

- A simple five step framework for navigating sibling conflict
- Exactly what to say during heated moments
- How to stay calm when emotions rise
- How to help kids repair in meaningful ways
- A daily rhythm that reduces rivalry and builds cooperation

You do not need perfection.

You just need a plan that feels clear, compassionate, and doable.

👉 [Reserve your spot for the workshop](#)

Closing

You are doing better than you think.

A more peaceful home is possible.