

As this all plays out, neurological connections are actually blazing pathways in your child's brain, setting them up to become more and more capable of holding onto their big feelings, of being self-regulated, and of knowing how to cope with the stresses, upsets, and disappointments of life.

And alongside all of this brain growth something else really amazing is happening in your child's heart. You are showing them how to be human. You are showing them how to *do* relationship. You are showing them how to adapt. This will happen over and over again, multiple times a day, for the next several years. And while it may feel relentless, the results of this labour of love will be amazing. Consider how much brain and heart growth could happen over the course of a regular childhood, as your children fight with each other, and as you come alongside and support with compassion and swagger!

Now fast forward several years to the day that your grown child's partner blows through the front door after work in a bad mood, taking out their bad day on anyone within range. The child who has learned to adapt will know how to come alongside their partner with understanding and compassion; without the skill of adaptation, they will be more apt to argue with reality, refuse to accept that which cannot be changed—which is that his partner is having a bad day—and throw gasoline on the fire by denying them compassion. Considering the potential number of your child's future relationships, choosing to respond with compassion and understanding will add up to a much happier existence. That is the result of honouring the sibling fight—adults who are truly grown up and who know how to *do* relationship.

When Fighting Strikes A Sour Note

Sometimes it may seem like all of the fighting has become too much to be good for anyone and you may discover your child has too much to adapt to and is sinking rather than swimming. If that sounds like your family's circumstance, there are a few things to consider that might help you lay the foundation for a better "lemonade" business.

Tend to the tree: Find your own way to peace first

Ask yourself what is the sauce that your children are marinating in every day. Are you stressed about work? Is there significant tension in the marriage relationship? Is there some other stressor in your family's environment that might be causing everyone to be a little more charged? Consider whether it is a situation you actually have control over. Even as a parent, finding your own way to peace in the face of things you cannot change often involves exactly the same kind of adaptation you are hoping to prime in your children. Check in and see if it might be time to support yourself by accepting your own frustration with the situation, understanding yourself with grace, finding your own sadness, and moving through it to a place of adaptation. As with your children, you may need to do this frequently with yourself.

Gather the fruit: Build one-on-one relationships

Consider the relationship you have with each of your children and how that might be contributing to the overall sibling dynamic. In her

book, *Peaceful Parent, Peaceful Siblings*, Dr. Laura Markham reveals how sibling fighting is often more illustrative of the parent-child relationship than the sibling relationship. The idea is that when one of your children senses their vital connection with you is threatened or scarce, they will be moved to thrash it out with the competition (in this case, their siblings). If you feel this might be the case, take time to nurture the relationship you have with each of your children, rather than focusing directly on the sibling relationship.

Run the kitchen: Secure your role

Determine whether you are really in the lead of the sibling dynamic for your kids. If you are in a personal state of overwhelm and frustration, you will not be presenting with an in-charge and confident kind of energy. Rather than parenting with true power, you will have to resort to parenting with reactive force which will have you feeling decidedly not in the lead at all. Children need parents who are truly leading them and they quickly notice when their adults are not in charge. Just think: *Lord of the Flies* would have ended differently had there been capable adults standing by! If something is getting in the way of you being truly in the lead of your children, take time to work through that first. Once you do, you will be able to step in for your children, each of them, all at once. The in-the-lead parent understands that staying connected to more than one of their children, especially in the heated moment of sibling conflict, can be done by nurturing that connection through multiple channels. Use your eyes, your voice, your touch. Let everyone know you are there and you've got this.

Try related recipes: Cater to connection

Think about how you are setting up the rhythm and routines in your home. Recall the last time you were feeling positively connected to your children: were you out on a family walk, or cooking a meal together? When connected, your children are probably less likely to kick up a fuss or succumb to the sibling dynamic. When your children feel connected to you, when your family life is full of routines and has a rhythm that caters to connection, and when you are present, stepping in, and providing, sibling fighting just won't need to flare up as often as a means of your children getting what they need: attention from and connection with you.

Believe it or not, sibling fighting can be a fabulous part of having a family with more than one child. As parenting educator and author Maggie Dent said, "Our families are our greatest classroom for learning how to get along with others." So next time you hear the telltale signs of a sibling squabble, do not despair. Instead, rub your hands together in delight at this perfect opportunity for growth. Don't try to squash or fix it. Surrender to the idea that it *needs* to happen. Your only job is to step in and come alongside it. Squeeze all of the gorgeous sourness you can out of that circumstance, and then watch it be transformed into sweet adaptation and growth. Growth for your children, and maybe even growth for you. •