



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you help your children get along with each other?

Ages & Stages

PRESCHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

All siblings argue, fight, tattle, and tease at one time or another. Each child in a family has a different personality and different likes, dislikes, and habits. To make things even more complex, the children are expected to share toys, space, and most importantly, their parents' love and attention. These factors are why arguing and teasing are so common between brothers and sisters.

There are things parents can do to help siblings get along better.

- Never compare your children to each other, even if the comparison is meant to be kind, such as, “You draw as nicely as your sister.” Each child is unique, with their own talents and abilities, so let each child know that you recognize what their talents are.
- Have one-on-one time with each child. Spend at least a few minutes of every day alone with each of your children and plan longer times for special activities every now and then. For example, take one child for a walk around the block or share an ice cream snack together, just the two of you. Make sure you create special one-on-one time and activities with all your children.
- Teach your children to be accepting, understanding, patient and respectful to others.
- Let each child have their own space, especially if they share a room with one or more siblings. Give them each a corner in the bedroom, or a chair at the table that is just for them.
- Let your children have alone time. They should not have to play together all the time. Siblings need time alone and time with friends apart from their siblings.
- Let them express their feelings about their siblings. When one says, “I hate her!” try saying, “You are very angry at your sister” instead of “You do not hate her. She is your sister and you love her.” Let the child know you understand how they feel.
- Never allow physical aggression or name calling between siblings.
- Stay out of any argument you did not see unless someone is hurt. If you must get involved, help your children solve the problem instead of solving it for them.
- Forget about figuring out who is to blame. It doesn't really matter who started it. It takes two people to fight.
- Work things out in peaceful and respectful ways in your own life. Your children will learn to follow your example.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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