



## Let's Work It Out

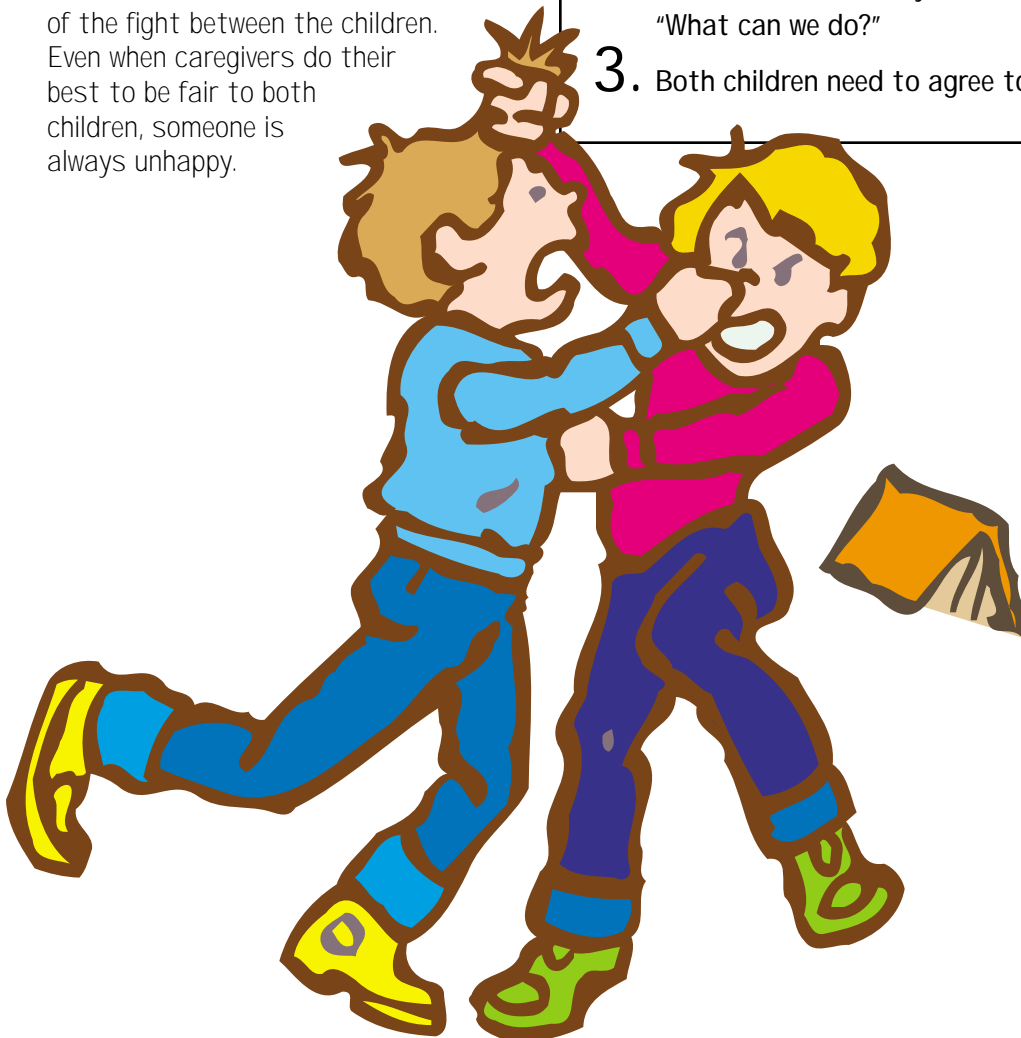
Two children are playing in the block area. Suddenly, you hear shouting. "It's mine!" "No, I had it first!" The shouting turns into screaming and crying as one child hits the other. Now they're both running to you. What do you do?

Does this sound familiar to you? Many caregivers and parents say these problem times are very stressful. The adult feels as if she's in the middle of the fight between the children. Even when caregivers do their best to be fair to both children, someone is always unhappy.

### TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO WORK OUT THEIR PROBLEMS

With an adult's help, children as young as three years old can begin to work out problems. Try these three easy steps:

1. Ask each child to name the problem by saying, "You two are having a problem. What is it?"
2. Ask each child for ways to solve the problem by saying, "What can we do?"
3. Both children need to agree to a solution for it to work.



## AN EXAMPLE:

Ezra and Phil are playing with small cars. Phil walks away to get some blocks to make a road. When he returns, he finds that Ezra has taken his red car.

Phil shouts, "That's my red car! You can't have it!"

Ezra shouts back, "No, I'm playing with it!"

Both boys are tugging at the red car as Susan, the caregiver, walks over.

**Susan: "You two are having a problem. What is it?"**

Phil: "I was playing with the red car. I went over to get some blocks to make a road. When I came back, Ezra took my car."

Ezra: "Phil wasn't playing with the red car any more, so I took it."

**Susan: "It sounds as if you both want to play with the red car. What can we do?"**

## Teach children to work out their own problems

Ezra: "I want to play with the red car. Phil can go play with the blocks."

**Susan: "Phil, what do you think about that idea?"**

Phil: "I'll let Ezra play with my blue car if I can play with the red one."

**Susan: "Ezra, would you like to play with Phil's blue car until he's finished playing with the red one?"**

Ezra: "Okay, I'll take the blue one."

**Susan: "Will this work for both of you?"**

Phil and Ezra: "Yes."

Susan: "Phil, would you tell Ezra when you're finished playing with the red car, so he can have a turn playing with it if he wants to?"

At first, children will need your help to go through the steps to working out problems. After they have done it a few times, you'll find they may get very good at stating the problem themselves and coming up with different solutions. There may even come a time when the children can work out problems without your help.

Going through the steps to working out problems with children will take longer than it takes for an adult to step in and take the toy away. But the extra time is worth it. When we teach children how to work out their problems, they learn a skill they can use all their lives.

**"I love helping children to work out their problems. Now I'm not in the middle any more. It's their problem. I just help them work it out."**

— Carolyn, family child caregiver



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