



## Dealing with Sibling Fighting using Compromise

Whenever there is a verbal fight, come in with a timer and set it for 5 or 10 minutes. You (the parent) say, “Find a compromise” to both kids, but stay in the room. You are staying in the room so you can see who is compromising and who is not. If the kids try to get you involved in the problem, just redirect them to talk to each other before the time is up (e.g., “I’m not solving the problem- so I would get working because you only have 4 minutes left.”) If, at any time, it gets physical, then end the discussion and the one that initiates the fight automatically gets sent to timeout and loses the argument.

### What is compromise

Trying to solve the problem

Talking in normal voice and expressing feelings

Listening to person

Talking respectfully

Coming up with solutions about future

Keep talking

### What is **not** compromise

Shooting down every potential solution

Yelling and attacking with words

Ignoring the other person,

Calling names or threatening

Arguing about the past (i.e., who did what)

Shutting down (i.e., staring into space and refusing to talk)

- **(Option A)** If both kids refuse to compromise, then parent(s) gets to come up with a solution that **neither** of the kids like (e.g., “Either you solve the problem or I will- and you won’t like how I solve it”)
- **(Option B)** If only one of them is compromising (based on what you can observe- not what reportedly happened before), then only the kid that compromises gets his or her way.
  - You may want to warn the non-compromiser by stating to the compromiser when there is about two minutes left on the timer, “Don’t worry \_\_\_\_\_, I can see you are trying and \_\_\_\_\_ is not. So if this keeps up you will get your way and she (or he) won’t.” This will reinforce the compromiser and may motivate the non-compromiser.
- **(Option C)** If they come up with a compromise before the time limit, praise both but check to make sure they both agree. Protesting the solution they came up with later is not an option (e.g., Parent: “Remember, if it is a compromise then you both agree on it so let me see if I got this right because there is no going back on this later [parent restates the kids devised solution].”) Feel free, however, to “veto” solutions that are dangerous or break house rules.



Notes:

- This procedure works best on kids who are eight and up. If kids are younger than this- you may have to offer suggestions (e.g., "I don't know what your sister will say, but maybe you could offer to share.")
- You may want to practice with all the kids what is and what is not a compromise before you put this into practice. In other words, role play what a compromise does and does not look like.
- If you have to use Option A or B, be prepared to be called "unfair" by one or both children. If so, use something like the following response before walking out of the room and ignoring [said matter-of-factly], "I don't know what happened before, but I know what I saw for the last 5 or 10 minutes, and that was neither of you really trying. Next time I hope you (or both of you) try to compromise." Say nothing else. Do not argue the point further, just implement the consequence on one or both children.
- Be prepared to practice this. They won't like it at first and many families have to stick with it for several weeks before kids start using the compromise skills. It will be a pain at first, but think of the pain involved if they never learn the art of compromise and you have to keep solving all their problems until they are adults.