



COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES
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SIBLING FIGHTING-REDUCTION TRAINING

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Definition: A method for a parent to stop siblings fighting by having them correct the problem together as a shared task, and once they are calm and polite, allowing them to resume their pre-fight activity.

Elements: Resisting being a referee or listening to complaints, the parent asks each fighting child to apologize to the other e.g. both must “say sorry” to each other before they can resume their pre-fight play. If only one child says ‘sorry’ and the other refuses, the parent does not correct the unremorseful child but instead asks both to give each other a hug, or to shake hands if they are adolescents. If both comply, they can resume their pre-fight play. If instead, one child’s attempted hug or handshake is rejected by the other, the parent ignores this and asks both children to immediately share completion of a boring simple task with a clear end-point. Afterward, they may resume their pre-fight play e.g. “Garrett and Andrew, I want you both to pick up the lint on the carpet. Garrett, you pick up the lint on the left side of the room, and Andrew you pick up the lint on the right side of the room. When you are both done you can go back to playing as before”. If they complete their shared task without fuss, they resume their previous play. If one child completes the task but the other does not, the obedient child can resume the pre-fight play, whereas the dissenting child/ren are not allowed to resume this play for 10 minutes. If neither child does the shared task, the parent ignores refusals or protests and forbids both from resuming play for 10 mins. Finally, the parent is taught to praise the siblings whenever they are nice to each other. The method is repeated each time fights break out, even 10-30 times a day, until conflicts gradually subside.

Related Procedures: *Restitution and overcorrection (positive practice), shame aversion, contingency management, time-out response interruption.*

Application: Children ages 3 to 18 in households (for parents); classrooms (classmates, instead of siblings); institutional settings, camps.

1st Use? Adams CD, Kelley ML (1992)

References:

1. Adams CD, Kelley ML (1992) Managing sibling aggression: *Behavior Ther*, 23, 707-717.
2. Olson RJ, Roberts MW (1987) Alternative treatments for sibling aggression. *Behavior Therapy*, 18, 243-250.
3. Ruben DH (2002) *Bratbusters: Say Good-bye to Tantrums and Disobedience*. New Orleans, LA: Wellness Institute, Inc. (updated, 2nd printing)
4. Macciomei NR, Ruben DH (1999) *Behavioral Management in the Public Schools: An Urban Approach*. NY: Praeger Press.

Case Illustration

Casey’s twins aged 7 (Sherwood and Toby) were fighting and swearing in the family room, wrestling and hitting one another on the floor after having disagreed on which video cartoons to watch. Casey entered the room and told them to come to her even

though they were running to her. Ignoring their tattling and “I hate you’s” to each other, she asked them to each apologize to the other by saying, respectively, “I’m sorry Sherwood,” and “I’m sorry Toby”. After each apologized, she asked them to hug each other. Sherwood began a hug but Toby flinched from it saying ‘I hate you’, which Casey ignored. She asked both children to count the number of tiles on the ceiling, Toby to count the tiles on the left and Sherwood the tiles on the right side of the ceiling. “Count quietly together and work like a team, and you can return to watching cartoons.” Toby counted the tiles but Sherwood didn’t, blaming Toby for the fights, which Casey ignored while allowing only Toby to watch cartoons. Casey told Sherwood he could watch them in 10 minutes time. Casey resisted her temptation to scold Sherwood for his disobedience. Rather, she patiently followed the procedure 10 times more that day whenever the children argued. She continued this procedure over the next two days. By day 3 the fights had almost stopped. Casey watched for when Sherwood and Toby were happy together and praised them for getting along nicely. Two weeks later 1-2 fights reappeared and Casey immediately re-applied the same method, which stopped fights for several more days. She continued to use the method effectively when the twins got out of hand occasionally.