

3 types of fights you should have in front of your kids

Think you should avoid fighting at all costs when your kids are in earshot? Think again!

While children shouldn't be exposed to the chronic stress of yelling, screaming, or physical fights in their homes, there are some types of conflict that might actually help your children grow healthier and smarter. Here are three fights that are okay – even good! – to have in front of your children.

A Fair Fight

Go ahead, have an argument with the kids around. Just make sure you do it respectfully, that everyone feels safe, and that they don't end up in the middle of it. It's not only okay to have an argument with your children present, it's important! Children will learn how to have healthy arguments with others by watching how the important adults in their lives deal with similar situations.

So hash it out with your spouse, teenager, or your parent when small conflicts arise. But be aware that you're providing a teaching moment. Make sure to fight fair by taking turns making your point.

Talk about how you're feeling instead of accusing, practice good listening skills, and debate calmly. Show your kids how to say "I'm sorry" when you realize you've been wrong or you've hurt someone. It's especially important to remember that kids should never be onlookers if an argument turns into a yelling match, or if the topics are better discussed with only adults present. And they should never be drawn into the argument themselves. They're learners, not referees! Kids' brains and bodies are impacted by lots of tension between their grown-ups. Don't have fights that make your blood pressure rise in front of your children – you should save those scuffles for later.

But if your partner insists that it's okay to put the Christmas tree up in August or you can't agree on what's for dinner, it's probably okay to talk this through with little ears present. Doing so will teach them that it's okay to have hard conversations, and it will show them how to dispute things in a way that is loving and respectful.



A Good Fight

Sometimes, the fight you should have is larger than a family conflict.

Your child may come home from school and tell you about a friend who's being bullied on the playground, or you may watch the news together and find out that a cause you care deeply about

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needs support. These situations present a great chance to fight for something important to you. It's always okay to show your kids how to do the right thing. Fighting for what's right will look different for every family, because every family has different values. For your family, this might mean calling the school to ensure the safety of your child's classmate. It could involve volunteering together to support a cause that's important to you. For some families, doing what's right might simply start with having conversations about socially important topics like bullying, homelessness, disabilities, or racial equality.

Your child can learn empathy and neighborliness from seeing his caregiver challenge things that seem unfair or just plain wrong. Even more, he can practice being a good friend and an active community member when you get him involved in these acts of kindness and community responsibility.

A Fight for Your Life

Have you been thinking about going back to school? Are you working long hours to gain a promotion or a raise? Are you considering picking up a new skill— finally learning to play the guitar or run a marathon? Becoming the best version of yourself is hard, but worth the fight.

Kids will sense when a parent is stressed or tired from working harder than usual. They'll benefit from communication about it, instead of wondering what's wrong. Explain to your child what your goals are and how you're working toward them in terms he can understand. You might tell your child, "I'm tired today because I stayed up very late doing an important project. I'm so proud of myself that I got it done, but I'm still sleepy."

Seeing you work hard to reach your own goals is a valuable experience for your child. This teaches her that everyone can have dreams, even grown-ups! By watching you face failures and successes on your way to accomplishment, they'll learn important lessons about reaching their own goals.

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There are lots of arguments you should save for grown-up ears only. But family life can't always be sunshine and roses, and it's important for kids to see what conflict can look like and how it can be resolved in healthy ways.

Showing your kids how to fight the right way will help them build the skills to fight their own battles as they grow. They'll also learn that they're capable of dealing with hard stuff, and because they've seen you overcome obstacles successfully, they'll know just who to go to when they need a little help.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 11/26/17. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.