

# BEHAVIORS OF 3-5-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN



## Situation #3: Fighting for a toy

Two 4-year-old girls were playing and were happy to be with each other. Everything seemed fine until Emma started screaming. Her friend Sally was on top of her, yanking her hair. Emma was screaming and pointing to a broken doll on the floor.

### Why is this happening?

#### Because children at this age

- Have difficulty sharing their things and toys.
- Still don't know how to control their emotions.
- Are learning to use words to solve problems.
- Want to control the people and things in their lives.
- Can be angry when they cannot decide how things should be.
- Have a hard time understanding that other people have different ideas.

### What can adults do in the situation described here?

1. Stay calm: Don't yell and don't use physical punishment.
2. Stop the fight and comfort the injured child.
3. Give time-out to the aggressive child to calm her: No more than 1 minute for each year of the child's age.
4. When both children are calm:
  - Ask them to use their own words to explain what the problem was.
  - Ask them to use words to tell how they are feeling about the fight.
  - Help them think of nonviolent ways to resolve the problem.
  - Tell them clearly that it is NOT OK to hurt someone.
  - Praise them if they go back to playing peacefully.

### What can adults do to prevent this problem in the future?

- Have different kinds of toys so the children can move from one to another.
- Put away the toys that your child absolutely does not want to share.
- Make sure that your child understands that the friends will not take the toys away when they leave.
- Use everyday life situations to teach your child to share his/her things.
- Whenever there is a conflict, teach your child to use words to show his/her feelings and to think of different ways to solve problems and resolve conflicts.

