

MARGARET W. NEAL, L.C.S.W.

3400 CENTRAL AVENUE, SUITE 310
RIVERSIDE, CA 92506-2181
CA LICENSE # LCS9622

Phone: 951-275-5200
www.margaretwneal.com

FOSTERING COOPERTIVE PLAY AMONG CHILDREN

- **TEACH CHILDREN THE WORDS TO PREVENT ARGUMENTS** – Help them practice using cooperative, kind words. For example, instead of grabbing a toy, teach your child to ask for it. If your child is told, “no,” he can then ask, “When you are done with it, will you let me know?”
- **WHEN CHILDREN ARE GRUMPY, TIRED, HUNGRY OR ILL**, they have less patience and less maturity to play well with others. So if your children are arguing, think about whether one of these issues needs to be addressed. Is today just one of those days when you have to lower your expectations or is this a day when they cannot play with each other?
- **PUT A TOY ON TIME-OUT WHEN CHILDREN ARE ARGUING OVER IT** – Then after a few minutes, say “If you are ready to share the toy, you can have it back.” The children will likely be ready to take turns with it so that they can at least play with the toy a little bit. Do not keep the toy away too long (for example, several hours or until the next day). The longer you keep the toy from them, the more you will decrease their interest in the toy. Thus, you could rob yourself of an opportunity for them to practice cooperating with each other.
- **SEPARATE CHILDREN BRIEFLY WHEN THEY ARE NOT PLAYING WELL TOGETHER (for example, too rough, or mean to each other).** – Just like with putting a toy on time-out, keep the children separated for only a few minutes. That way when they get back together they will be more willing to follow your rules in order to be able to play together. (This works only when they really do want to play together. If they would rather play alone, this technique will not work and they are probably best playing alone.)

>>>>>TURN OVER>>>>>

- **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR CHILDREN’S GOOD BEHAVIOR** –When they are playing well together, “catch them being good.” Check on them and make a positive comment about what they are doing. Praise them for following a specific rule. Otherwise, if you wait to check on them only when you hear them misbehaving, they will get used to negative attention. Children need your positive guidance to stay on track.
- **STOP TRYING TO BE THE DETECTIVE TO FIGURE OUT “WHO STARTED IT”** – Instead, if their behavior gets out of hand and you need to give a consequence, both or all of the children get the same consequence. That encourages them to handle disagreements among themselves without you having to be the judge of who deserves a punishment. This works best if you are also teaching your children ways to problem-solve and handle disagreements. This method will not work if one child is a bully and intimidates another child.
- **TEACH YOUR CHILDREN HOW TO PROBLEM-SOLVE AND HANDLE DISAGREEMENTS ON THEIR OWN** – Use storybooks, puppets, dolls, play-acting and other methods to teach your children how to get along with others. Get them involved in acting out ways to solve disagreements. This will be a long-term process you will continue throughout the years you are raising them. (See the handout “What If Game: A Social Skills Game”).

Margaret W. Neal, LCSW is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Riverside, CA. Her work focuses on “helping children and their parents.” For more information, visit Margaret’s website at www.margaretwneal.com.