

Negative relationship between brothers a cause for concern

Yvette:

My 5-year-old seems to be very hateful toward his 3-year-old brother. Last week, I overheard him saying, "One day I'm going to get a real gun!"

My son is not aggressive toward anyone else, and I do not allow violent shows in the house. Should I be concerned?

Kim

Kim:

Anytime a child says they want to use a gun to kill someone, you must pay attention, particularly when you have noticed a hateful or negative relationship toward your younger son. Often feelings like these stem from the older child feeling a loss with the arrival of the younger sibling.

Understand why your older son has these feelings, and if you have a sense of unease about the boys' relationship, seek professional guidance. In situations like these, the parental response is generally the key to success.

First, be very clear with your older son that some things are simply unacceptable in this family. There is "no cursing, no name-calling or threatening behavior toward family; no door slamming; and no yelling."

Allow him to have input in the "family rules" and explain to him the consequences when he breaks them.

Next, give your sons some individual time with you. Create special days where they each get you to themselves for a portion of the day. This makes children feel special and allows you to focus your attention solely on them. Children need their own space.

Schedule activities with different friends, and don't insist that they share everything or that they always play together.

Also, have fun together as a family. Whether you're watching a movie, throwing a ball or playing a board game, you're establishing a peaceful way for your kids to spend time together and relate to each other. This helps ease tensions between them and keeps you involved. Since parental attention is something many kids fight over, fun family activities can reduce conflict.

Yvette

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During parent-teacher conferences, I was told that my 5-year-old daughter often plays alone during recess.

I think part of this stems from the fact that she's extremely sensitive when her peers accidentally hurt her during play or

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say things that hurt her feelings. It takes her a long time to recover. I want her to learn how to work out her own problems and to develop the social and emotional skills to succeed.

Nancy

Nancy:

I suggest creating opportunities for your daughter to have successful peer relationships. Schedule some individual play dates with children in her class so she can get to know them better. It's much easier to navigate peer relationships with one child than with a group. Ask your daughter who she likes to play with and why.

Role-play with her around some peer interactions that you know have been hurtful for her, and offer her different ways to handle them.

Consider enrolling her in an organized activity that builds self-confidence. Girl Scouts may help her learn to overcome her shyness and develop self-confidence. There are all kinds of groups with which she can connect.

As for you, pay attention and intervene only when necessary. The best gift you can give her is to allow her to navigate these relationships. With your gentle guidance, she'll discover how to make friends and, eventually, how to stand up for herself.

Yvette

Families are encouraged to send their parenting questions concerning their children's challenging or difficult behavioral issues to Brown at columbusparent@thisweeknews.com or *Columbus Parent Magazine*, 7801 N. Central Dr., Lewis Center, OH 43035.



Yvette McGee Brown is a former Domestic Relations/Juvenile Court Judge. She is currently the president of the Center for Child and Family Advocacy at Columbus Children's Hospital.