

How to get your children to stop fighting

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SUMMARY

The podcast discusses the common issue of sibling fighting and offers insights into understanding and managing these conflicts. The host emphasizes that many parental reactions to sibling rivalry stem from their own childhood experiences and stresses the importance of addressing these feelings to foster a calmer environment for children. By recognizing unmet needs and facilitating open communication, parents can help their children navigate conflicts more effectively.

- Sibling fighting is a prevalent challenge for parents, often leading to frustration and feelings of helplessness.
- Parental reactions to sibling conflicts may be influenced by their own childhood experiences with siblings.
- It's crucial for parents to create a pause between their children's behavior and their own reactions to maintain calm.
- Children often fight as an unskillful attempt to meet unmet needs for attention, connection, or understanding.
- Parents should focus on identifying and addressing these unmet needs rather than solely reacting to the fighting.
- One-on-one "special time" with each child can help fulfill their need for connection and reduce conflicts.
- Open communication about feelings and needs can empower children to resolve conflicts independently.
- Treating each child as an individual with unique needs is essential for reducing sibling rivalry and fostering harmony.

[Music] foreign Mojo podcast your kids never fight right I didn't think so I have all the challenges that parents come to me with sibling fighting is one of the biggest and it seems like no matter what they've tried it never gets better a lot of these parents tell me they're able to stay calm as their children start poking at each other either

verbally or physically and even when tensions are escalating and then eventually something explodes and they can't keep it together anymore and they scream at their kids just to stop it and if their children would just stop doing this then of course our lives would be so much easier so can they just stop I'm going to adjust the elephant in the room right up front and say that I'm the parent of one child so I don't have

a problem with sibling rivalry I've never wanted to have more than one child because I'm selfish and I like the life that I have with one child and because I know that I'm a better parent to one child than I could ever be to more than one and Karis has actually never wanted a sibling we actually ask her for fun on a fairly regular basis just to see what she says and she always says no or

buries her face in a pile of pillows or in some other way indicates that that would be a terrible idea but I have worked with a lot of parents who have multiple children and who have used the ideas that I'm going to share here in this episode and have found relief from the seemingly endless sibling fighting so I'll walk you through

how I've worked with one particular family where the parents started out by saying my kids

are always fighting and doing things to intentionally make the other one sad or scared it's really stressful and triggering for me I can't leave them together for five seconds because one of them will hurt the other one physically or emotionally we might have the same exact two toys and they each have one and then the other will just go and rip it out of the other person's hand and throw it across the room and then it

will end up getting physical I'm having a hard time even going to the bathroom some days because I never know what's going to happen when they're together sometimes they can play together really well for a long time but then sometimes things go south immediately and just a few weeks after saying that this parent's still very young children were able to start addressing many of the challenges they were having between themselves without the parent even having to be involved at all so in this

episode we're going to talk through the factors that are involved in sibling fighting which almost always go way deeper than whatever it is they're fighting about right now there are two main buckets of factors things that are going on inside us and things that are happening for our children it's almost always easiest to focus on yourself first so let's start there and then we'll move into what to do with your children so starting with ourselves we need to

understand why we are having such a big reaction to our children's fighting and pretty often that happens for one of two reasons the first of these is that we had a crummy relationship with our own siblings so maybe you are the oldest and you had to look out for the younger ones and they got to be kids and to push back and not to be the responsible one and you didn't get to do that you were the

enforcer you had to keep them in line because your parents were working or had mental health challenges or other things going on that meant they couldn't fully parent their children so you have a strained relationship with your siblings because of that or maybe you weren't the eldest or the biggest and you're older and bigger sibling used to beat up on you that would have been a really difficult experience for you you were probably afraid of your sibling and tried to

manage their feelings so that you wouldn't set them off and to a greater or lesser extent you lived under the threat of what this older and bigger person would do to you so when your children fight with each other even if it's objectively a very little disagreement you have a narrative in your head about how if you don't stop this now they're going to end up in the same Dynamic that you did with the bigger stronger one beating up on the

smaller weaker one and the smaller one's going to get hurt perhaps one time perhaps many times in the future the important thing to recognize in this is that your children's relationship is not the same as the relationship you had with your sibling it reminds you of the relationship with your sibling because you have a heightened awareness of tension all of your antenna up and your radar is constantly scanning for any threat and as soon as you see something

that looks remotely like what happened between you and your sibling your brain goes into that catastrophizing mode where you expect the worst but that isn't our children's thing to navigate that's our thing to navigate we need to address the hurt that we've experienced perhaps through therapy so they're probably relatively small squabbles don't turn into a massive thing for us not doing this healing work is always an option but we may well find that we're able to be around our children with more

ease and calm if we do work on this and even if we think we can keep a lid on it now we may well find the kinds of struggles they have in the future escalate and Trigger us then so figuring out how to cope with it better now could really stand Us in good Stead so the other half of the stuff related to you is when you and your sibling or siblings had a great relationship when

you see your own children fighting you again catastrophize and think well if they're fighting like this now how are they ever going to have the amazingly close relationship that I have with my siblings and then we panic and we think this is a thing that needs to be fixed urgently once again this is our thing to navigate rather than theirs just because they're squabbling now doesn't mean they won't be amazingly close later and conversely if they aren't squabbling now that

doesn't mean they'll be amazingly close later we can never know how our own relationship with somebody else will turn out never mind how the relationship between two other people is going to turn out we think that if we can prevent them from fighting now we'll be doing everything we can to make sure they get along with each other later but we have no way of knowing this all we can do is be here with what's here right now today

so whichever of these things is true for you the best thing you can do is to create a pause between your child's behavior and your reaction you can use a lot of different tools to create that pause parents I work with like to keep a hair tie on one wrist to remind them of their intention to be present with their children's struggle and before they do or say anything in these difficult moments they transfer the hair tie to

the other wrist you can write down phrases that are meaningful to you things like my relationship with my children is the most important thing and post them on sticky notes around your house so you can look at them when you need them creating that pause is a big part of what we do in The Taming your triggers Workshop but that doesn't mean there's nothing else you can do another part of what you can do is look

at why your children are fighting in the first place and address that and then you won't find yourself in these difficult situations nearly as often so that's the second part of our episode here today when I ask parents why their children fight they often say it just comes out of nowhere or it happens for any one of 300 reasons one of them has something the other one wants one of them's building something the other one knocks

it over or one of them finds something the other one does to be really irritating once again we can deal with these very different causes in different ways the important thing to keep in mind is that when our children are doing this Behavior we find so difficult it's always always always an attempt to meet an unmet need our job is to be a needs detective to try to uncover the unmet need so we can help them meet that need and then they

won't fight as much anymore the main thing we're looking out for here is whether the difficulties are happening in one or a few kinds of situations over and over again or whether they're happening seemingly all the time across multiple types of situations let's start with the individual one-off situations first and I'm going to introduce children's genders into a fictitious story just to make it easier to follow this example is actually taken from my book which now has a title it's called

Parenting Beyond power it's available for pre-order right now before it's released on August 1st so let's say your four-year-old son is building a really tall block tower in the living room while you're in another room nearby and your two-year-old daughter comes running in all of a sudden you hear a big crash as the blocks hit the floor and then your two-year-old screams which usually means the four-year-old is hitted what do you do so just take a moment put yourself in

that situation or a similar situation you've had with your child and imagine what you might do and what you would say to your child okay so let's let's give this a whirl let's try and imagine together how this conversation might go so maybe you come running into the living room and you say hey stop it don't smack your sister like that we do not hit and your son refuses to look at you and so you can tell the little sister and

say something like there there it's okay it's not your fault and to your son you say what on Earth were you thinking and your son is still avoiding looking at you and says something like she knocked my tower over and you've just been about able to keep a little on your feelings up to that point but then it explodes and you say I don't care you can build another one I know it's hard to have something knocked

down but that's no excuse don't hit your sister go and sit in the corner for three minutes and when you come back you better be ready to apologize to her and so your son goes and sits in the corner and when he comes back he says something that sounds vaguely like sorry and so it seems like the interaction's over and that the child has learned a lesson but what has really happened here let's walk this through step by step so

the parent came in and judged one child as the aggressor and the other is the victim the parent asked a rhetorical question about what the older child was thinking but they aren't really asking to get an answer the child is feeling unsafe in that moment and completely disconnected from their parent so they're not going to say anything about how they're really feeling these rhetorical questions are actually quite shame inducing you may be able to remember times when your own parents

asked you these kinds of questions and how disconnecting it was to be on the receiving end you might have known that you had to respond but that would never be with anything that actually revealed anything about yourself then the parent created even more Separation by sending the child to time out and this can seem like a reasonable option after all the child has to be punished in some way for hitting right otherwise they'll think that hitting is

acceptable and they'll keep doing it the parent picks a time out as the least harmful punishment they can think of and forces the child to apologize at the end and superficially the situation is fixed but under the surface it's

anything but fixed we've either created or more likely widened a rift between us and our child and the child is probably feeling both angry and resentful toward their sibling and toward their parent as well but what else are we supposed to do

doesn't any alternative mean that we're letting our child get away with behavior that we think is clearly unacceptable well no it doesn't so let's see how this interaction might go differently so the Situation's the same your son's in the living room building a block tower you're close by but not in the same room you hear your daughter come running into the living room she crashes the blocks Hit the Floor followed by the scream what do you do

firstly you use some of the tools we talked about in the first part of this episode and create a pause between your child's behavior and your response so unless you think somebody is in very grave danger at this point rather than rushing into the situation pause transfer your hair tie from one wrist to the other look at your sticky notes take a deep breath remind yourself of your intention and of what's most important to you and also that you don't have to

completely fix this situation right now you don't have to teach your son a lesson in this moment all you have to do is make sure everyone is safe so as you go into the room you're looking for anyone who is hitting anyone else or any other kind of danger and separating children if that's the case if anyone is hurt then of course you can Comfort them but try to do it in a way that doesn't put any blame on anyone for

what happened you don't actually need to say anything in that moment you can just be with them with a calm presence which hopefully is actually a calm presence because you haven't been stuffing your feelings down you've taken those few moments before you came into the room to re-regulate yourself if you do want to say something it could be something as simple as sounds like you're both having a hard time right now huh or if you became dysregulated as well

you could say we're all having a hard time right now huh then just sit with your children with no need to do anything or fix anything or get anyone to learn any lesson in that moment just be present with them if they want to talk about it you can engage but if they don't that's fine too maybe they'll pick up their play again or you might suggest that one child comes and does something with you then later you could go to the older

child and say something like hey I noticed we've been having a hard time when your toys are out in the living room would it be okay if we chat about it and so notice the difference between this opening and the opening in the first version of this scenario the parent is coming in without blaming anyone and saying we're having a hard time not you're doing something wrong and you need to change your behavior the parent is also inviting the child

into a discussion and is willing to not have a discussion right now if the child doesn't want to and you may be thinking well then my child is just going to say they don't want to talk about this and they get away with this unacceptable behavior and my response would be that you can't force them to have a conversation with you you

can force them to listen while you talk but you can't force them to really share what's going on with them

you may have been doing the lectures for a while now already and so far it has not encouraged your child to change their behavior so you get out of the immediate situation with as much grace and connection as possible and then later when everyone's re-regulated you open up this conversation and invite your child to join you assuming your child does indicate their willingness to participate then you can say something like it seems like sometimes we're having trouble when your

toys are on the floor and your sister's in the room she's always really interested in what you're doing right and sometimes she knocks your Tower even when you're building what's going on for you when that happens when you ask this you're continuing your non-judgmental observation of the situation and inviting your child to share their feelings without saying how do you feel about that which causes a lot of children to shut down maybe your child says something like I

don't like it when she knocks my stuff over and from this we can extrapolate how they're feeling we don't need them to actually tell us I'm feeling frustrated to know that they're feeling frustrated we don't need them to tell us that they're feeling anxious as soon as they hear a little foot sister's footsteps coming down the hallway we can even hold space for the child's anger as his achievement is knocked down again and so then we can empathize with

something like oh I hear you I bet it's really tough to have to keep an eye out for her all the time and it must feel frustrating to have to start all over again when she knocks your stuff over or takes it and then we're watching our child closely looking for some sort of acknowledgment we might get an enthusiastic year or a nod or even just a non-verbal softening towards us then we're going to continue empathizing

and start looking for the child's needs we might say something like yeah I would have a hard time with that too and I know I feel overwhelmed when you hit her because I need to keep her safe what were you trying to do earlier when she came in here the parent has identified their feeling of overwhelm their need for the younger sibling safety and asked another indirect question to try and understand this child's need and maybe the child

responds I was trying to build the tallest tower ever and from there we can understand the child has a need for a competence in building a tall tower and the space to do it in and the freedom from interference by their younger sibling we don't need them to tell us this we can extrapolate it based on what they did tell us again we continue to empathize we also ask the child to consider their siblings perspective with something like oh that

sounds like so much fun what do you think your sister was trying to do when she came in maybe the child has no idea and you have to supply an idea or maybe the child can get us part of the way there saying something like I think she wanted to help but she's so annoying she always takes my stuff and so the child is saying his sister has a need for contribution in wanting to help we can add some more empathy and confirm

this child's assessment of the siblings need if I were you I would probably find that annoying too I think she does want to help I wonder if she also just wanted to be close to you she really loves you so he's also identified another potential need for connection and so this child might respond I know but I still don't want her to do it so he's empathizing with his sister by saying I know he's also reasserting his

own needs and then we might say I hear you so when she came in it sounds like you wanted to build a really tall tower and you wanted space to do that and you also wanted the freedom to do it without your system messing things up is that right and so the parents restating this child's needs and asking for confirmation again we're looking for the child to verbally agree or to nod or in some way move towards us to indicate

we're on the right track and then we can say okay and I need to know that your sister's safe and she wants to help so her need to contribute and spend time with you so her need for connection I wonder what we can do that meets everybody's needs now if you're new to this way of working with children don't expect miracles here your child is probably not going to produce a list of ways that we can meet

everyone's needs but what we're doing is seeding the idea that meeting everyone's needs is possible so maybe they say I don't know and then the parent responds well one option I see would be that you could build important stuff in your room with the door closed and then your sister wouldn't be able to mess up your Tower obviously this parent is new to this approach and suggests an idea that doesn't actually meet everyone's needs it meets the needs the parent of this

child have stated but it doesn't meet little sister's needs for connection and contribution and then maybe the older sibling also realizes he has a need for connection and says I don't want to be by myself in my room all the time and then the parent comes up with another idea well what if we put up the old baby gates around an area in the living room and you could build in there you could always pass stuff through to

your sister when she wants to help but she wouldn't be able to get to your towers and you'd still be in the living room where we all hang out would that work for you and then the child responds yeah and I can put a few blocks out for her to play with so she could help with those and so what we've done here is identified each person's needs in this interaction and come up with a preliminary plan to meet them

we can try to put this plan into place and either it will work in that the tower won't get knocked down and both children will have their needs for a connection and collaboration met which also meets the parents need for safety and their unstated need for ease and harmony but it's also possible that putting the plan into action will help us to surface other needs and the situation won't work in which case we can go back and say hey

we thought this was going to help us but it doesn't seem like it is can we talk about that what's not working for us and go from there at this point you might be thinking okay this sounds amazing but how am I ever going to get the time to do this and how is it really going to help in the long term aren't I going to have to have an endless number of these conversations and the answer to that is

no it's almost impossible for me to think about sibling struggles without thinking back to parents Adriana and Tim whom I worked with for over a year I interviewed them last year and I'd like to play you a couple of excerpts of that conversation we'll start with them parenting one pretty easy going child and then all the struggles that come with adding a second child came along so Bodhi our five-year-old when he he's just always been like really when he was

young he was really easy going like I remember we lived in West Boylston so like he couldn't he was probably like right around too when he had like a tantrum and I remember being like I think this is like his first like real show of like Defiance like he doesn't do this like he listens he he's logical he doesn't take risks like he's just yeah we thought we were like parents of the year um and so it really got challenging I think

when we had a second child I think that's when we really felt like we were absolutely drowning yeah I really think we I I felt and I think I dreamed it as well that we were like killing it at being parents the best they really give the best parents ever with the best kid ever and we were just so great and he was so great and it was so easy not always easy but um but then it just you get a second

child and but also like we it's not we were reading a lot of Janet Lansbury stuff we were listening to her podcast we had read her books we were reading her blogs if we had a problem I would literally Google Janet Lansbury temper tantrum Janet Lansbury kid won't get in car seat you know what I mean so we had this like respectful parenting foundation and those tools were enough for a long time and then yeah I mean I think that we got to a

point where it was like I mean I just remember like being in the car and both kids both of our kids do not like the car at all they're so good at it now though uh but they did not like being in the car and that really is not easy at all um so we were like driving and I'm driving and bodhi's upset and Remy's upset and you just get to this like

insane point where like I'm mad at her because they're out of control and I know she's not it's not her fault you know um but I still can't help it be mad at her for it um for no reason at all um and just just didn't like that feeling at all of just like having these out of control like insane thoughts going on of being mad at my wife because the kids are crying what was that something weird like for

you Adriana so honestly um to be like totally transparent like on I would say like the first two years of having a second child um I really struggled with postpartum depression and anxiety and like um it really shaped how I was able to manage parenting and like I I still have these values of being respectful and and treating my children

the way they deserve to be treated but I I think that like not treating my mental health problems um because it's more than just like go take a bath it's gonna be fine like I really needed to do some some bigger things than that the baths totally helped but there was more to be done and I think that it just felt impossible so having the two kids is hard um on its own for anybody but then

dealing with those mental health challenges on top of it not being honest and open with my family about what's

really going on for me and just like keeping a lot of it to myself it was a really really hard time yeah and I think that you know that was impossible because it was like we both wanted to do well so bad and we're like reading books and practicing things and like practicing mindfulness and meditating and like doing service work and just

like doing everything we can and still falling short and just being exhausted and falling short all the time just waiting to stop surviving yeah just you know like when is it gonna when are we gonna stop just surviving when are we gonna stop drowning when is this gonna be okay and I do think when your kids get older things get easier but I also think when you're able to have like an internal shift of how you look at

things that is a big game changer too yeah now it was actually Adriana that I quoted at the beginning of this episode who couldn't even go to the bathroom without the two children laying into each other she and I had talked about the ideas that I've shared in this episode on our group coaching calls and other parents commented on a post that she put up in our community with ideas based on these principles and empathize with how hard

it is and said that it does get easier and suddenly something clicked about understanding each other's needs one night their four-year-old Bodhi didn't want to go to bed Tim told Bodie it was bad time Bodie said but Daddy mama would ask me what's going on for me and we would come up with ideas together so they did that and they found that Bodhi didn't want to stop coloring because he was feeling worried that he would forget

what colors he wanted to use they quickly realized that Tim could write down bodhi's ideas about what colors to use and then remind him in the morning Bodhi was thrilled and happily went to bed just a few days later Adriana posted in the community again and said I hope it's okay to share another win here you are the only people who would understand and I'm just so amazed and here's what happened she came and was trying to like color on

his paper and he was like wait a second I mean let's talk about this what do you need right now and she said I just really wanted some extra play time with you because you spend so much time coloring lately and he said okay how about if I stop coloring for a few minutes and go play with you she said okay and they went and played together yeah magical and they were how old at that time

uh like maybe like just three and four so it is possible to use these tools not just between you and your child but the more you use them the more they'll start to see each other's feelings and needs as well and look for ways to meet both of their needs your children don't need to be very old either you just get started and they pick up on doing it with you okay let's move on to our last category

of ways that this fighting can show up which is when it seems to come out of nowhere and it's constantly happening every day the more you see it is happening in many situations the more likely it is that this has more to do with each child's relationship with you rather than a struggle they're having between the two of them I think we can't really fully appreciate how much adding a sibling rocks an older Child's World they were the apple of our

eye and we spent a lot of time together and we kept track of all their milestones and then all of a sudden there's another person in the family who's taking all the parents time and attention and it's almost like the older sibling is out in the cold especially if the older sibling is several years older than the baby we expect the older one to be able to wait and to not have a tantrum when they can't get their way immediately

we know that children think that bad things that happen in their family are their fault the child thinks the parent is the best thing ever so if the parent is shouting at the child then the child can't think oh my parent is shouting at me they're having a hard time the child thinks my parent is shouting at me so there must be something wrong with me when we're constantly short-tempered and telling our older children to wait and

reminding them how much they love their new sibling when in reality they may have decidedly mixed feelings about it the child assumes that their parent is the one who is right and there must be something wrong with them the child then a power Dynamic often builds up where the parents are constantly telling the older child what to do and what not to do and to be gentle with the baby and to not hit the sibling and the child

knows that hitting the parent isn't acceptable and they have all this frustration and anger and this comes out as hitting the sibling one thing we can really do to help our children here is to allow them to feel all the difficult feelings they may have about being an older sibling even if we think we're being pretty understanding it can be really hard for us to hear our older child say something like I wish we didn't have a baby and

all the feelings that we're having about wanting them to get along and wanting things to be just a little bit easier right now come out in our interactions with the older child and our frustration with them the more we can lean into hearing them when they express how much they don't want to have a sibling the more our older child is going to hear the message my parent loves and accepts me just the way I am no matter what I say or do

if your child is on the older side so the new sibling is a toddler or even older perhaps there's even a second sibling on the way or already here if the oldest has never had a chance to process the huge loss they've experienced you might try to create some space for them to do that you can talk with them about how they have a hard time with things their sibling does they may not even consciously remember a

time when their sibling wasn't around but they still hold what it feels like to be the only child in their implicit memory which is where we store Impressions and images and feelings from our early childhood even though we can't tell a coherent story about it all that stuff is still buried in there both for our children and for us as well they may well need to be able to say that sometimes they don't like their sibling or even hate their sibling and

wish they could have you all to themselves and when you think about how to respond to that just think about how you might want a partner to respond when you're having a hard time many of our partners probably try to fix the situation when we're struggling or offer helpful hints for things that we should do differently and many of us get absolutely exasperated if that happens because what do we actually want we just want someone to listen to us and not judge us and

maybe reassure us a bit we usually don't want Solutions or reminding that things can't be the way we wish they could be our children are just the same so reminding them how they can't be the only child again is not going to help instead we can just be with them in the hard stuff and empathize and rub their back or give them a hug if that would feel good to them and that really is enough if you're seeing a lot of competitive

Behavior or hitting and squabbling across many kinds of situations what you're probably seeing is an unskillful attempt to meet a need for connection with you if you're thinking how on Earth could that be true then I'd invite you to think about how often we adults with our fully developed free frontal cortexes and a lot more understanding of ourselves and how the world Works use unskillful strategies to try to meet our needs I often think back to a time when I got

sick of being the one who unloaded the dishwasher every single flipping day and I picked a fight with my husband about it because he gets up late in the mornings and he never unloads the dishwasher so what happened here is I decided on a strategy that was going to help me meet my need my need was for collaboration and I had decided that my husband unloading the dishwasher was the only strategy that was going to help

meet my need and I picked a fight with him with a goal of getting my need met now in hindsight of course I can see the mistakes I made if I have a need for collaboration with my husband there are a hundred ways that I could ask for help to get that need met a few of those do involve a dishwasher but the vast majority of them do not instead of using my unskillful attempt of picking a fight to get my needs met I

could have approached him and said something like hey I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed at the moment because I'm working really long hours and I'd like to feel more of a sense that we're on the same team than I felt recently have you noticed that too would you be willing to help me do X and are there some things that I can help you with that would make your life easier and if I'd approached him in that way

then I'm almost 100 sure he would have been receptive to helping me meet my need instead of reacting defensively so let's bring this back to our children when our children are fighting with each other you can imagine that they're doing what I was doing when I picked the fight with my husband they're using an unskillful strategy to try to meet one or more needs so how can we possibly know what needs they have well I'd be willing to go on a

limb and say that a couple of needs are most likely at the top of the list here firstly there's connection with you when your child picks a fight with their sibling they know you're going to be on them lickety-split they probably wish that they could have your positive attention but they will take your negative attention over no attention at all so they pick a fight with their sibling in an unskillful attempt to meet their need for connection with you by doing

something to get your attention another important unmet need they may have is to be known and understood we all have some variation on that need even our children we want to know that someone else sees us for who we really are who gets us who loves us not only in spite of all the weirdnesses we have but maybe even because

of them I want that I'm pretty sure you want that I'm pretty sure your child wants it

too when they pick a fight with their sibling once again they're using an unskillful strategy to tell you hey you're not seeing me you're not seeing what's really important to me and what I'm struggling with and why I'm behaving the way I'm behaving I'm feeling frustrated and angry and I don't know how to tell you that and I don't think you would hear me if I told you I know I'll get yelled at if I hit you and this

anger has to come out somehow so I'm going to hit someone in our family who has less power than me because I don't know what else to do when we think about it in that way it's heartbreaking right if we can imagine our child saying something like this to us does it create any more empathy for their situation and any desire to try to come toward them instead of requiring them to change their behavior the answer to all of these unmet needs

is to spend some one-on-one time with our children it can be as little as 10 minutes a day but the important aspects are of this are that it's predictable and that the child gets to decide what you do during the time you can even call it special time so it feels really special to them if you've done special time with your child before you may have found that no matter how much you give them they always want more and making it

predictable really helps with that most likely when it's a one-off thing the child always wants to ring every last minute out of it this time because they never know when they're going to get it again when you make it predictable you take away that fear that they're never going to get it again and you also make it easier to hold a boundary and say we've had special time today we can have more special time tomorrow if you can allow your child to say when

in the day the special time happens most of us have a pretty deeply embedded idea that we should work first and play when work is done which means that when our child asks to play we'll often respond I can't play right now because I have to work things really shifted for my daughter and me when I realized that unless I was on a call I really could just shift my work time back a little bit and play

with her first then she was willing to work with me on a whole lot of things where previously she'd been pushing back allowing the child to direct the play does two things firstly it allows you to show how much importance you put on their ideas and I know this isn't always easy we went through a solid month long stretch where my daughter wanted me to help her sort rocks in our garden every single day during our special time

I had a lot of mental resistance to that because it was such a meaningless activity but she really enjoyed it and I ended up using it as my mindfulness practice I realized that if I actually focused on what was happening in the moment that the sun on my arms felt good and the Rocks were sort of interesting and she felt really connected to me and the experience actually wasn't terrible I've worked with a lot of parents who

have really struggled with this and who cannot bring themselves to do pretend play without seeing the cobwebs on the bookshelves and using the time to mentally build a to-do list being present with our children can be hard

because we might not know how to play with them in what they consider to be the right way we open ourselves up for a rejection because they may say we're doing it wrong or they may just not engage with

us we might mess up the first few times we do it but if we keep trying we will probably find a number of activities we can do together that are at least bearable for us and that fill our child's cup and then it becomes easier to do parents often try to treat each of their children exactly the same but that almost always backfires because each child is a unique person with their own unique needs if you have a sibling you can probably

look back and see what you needed from your parents or caregivers and what your sibling needed from them and how different those two things were if your parents tried to treat you equally it's possible neither of you got what you really needed you can also see this in your relationships today maybe with a partner or a very close friend when you think of the things the other person enjoys doing and how they communicate and how they

want to be supported when they're having a hard time that may be very different from the things you enjoy doing and how you communicate and how you want to be supported when you're having a hard time so if a person were to treat you both the same then some pretty big needs would be missed when we can see each sibling's unique needs and help to meet those needs they almost certainly won't fight as much nobody likes fighting with other people

even if your child says they do like it or that they're annoying their sibling on purpose they like it to the extent that having some power over someone else feels better than them having power over you but getting your needs met feels better than both of those things so if we can help them to do that they won't fight anymore I reached out to Adriana a year after she and Tim recorded the conversation with me to find out how things were

going and to see if she would be willing to contribute a story for my book and this is what she sent me she said growing up in an abusive household followed by years of drug addiction didn't exactly set me up for success as a parent all I knew is I needed to not be like my parents but I had no idea how to navigate parenting respectfully while also managing mental health challenges I knew early on as a parent that my values

often didn't match my actions but I didn't know what else to do I thought power struggles sibling squabbles and just surviving were normal parts of Parenthood the tools I learned from Jen changed everything about my relationships with my children and even my husband when I learned how to have problem-solving conversations with my children and really hear and see them we were able to work through challenges I never thought possible and now they do this between themselves as well too without me

needing to step in even on the now rare occasions when my children are simultaneously having a hard time and both want to be in physical contact with me they work with me to figure out how they can both do that without me feeling overwhelmed life is far from perfect but my family is really thriving and I know these life-changing tools will help us with whatever challenges come our way parenting is finally fun and then we emailed back and forth a bit

and she wrote to me it's just so cool to reflect back on where I was a year ago I literally dreaded parenting I counted down the minutes until I got a break what a difference to really look forward to the things I used to dread thanks again for everything so if your siblings are at each other's throats all the time right now I hope this episode has helped you to understand a bit more about why that's

the case and some other things you can do to shift their Dynamic that will also make parenting easier and more joyful for you [Music]