



Sibling Rivalry Toolbox

The Caterpillar Mediator

In essence Curly is a mediator. Everything he does is from that skills base.

The role of mediator is used more and more these days in all walks of life. It is proving to be the most successful type of conflict resolution intervention. So, why do they work?

Listening: When we listen we find out more about what has happened. It can take a while for a child, or an adult, to tell the full story of what they think and how they feel. Listening also helps the other person feel valued, which in turn helps them to calm down.

Does not Judge: If we judge other people we lose the opportunity to learn more about what has happened and also make the other person defensive towards us. Judging others also stops the building of trust which is critical to any agreement.

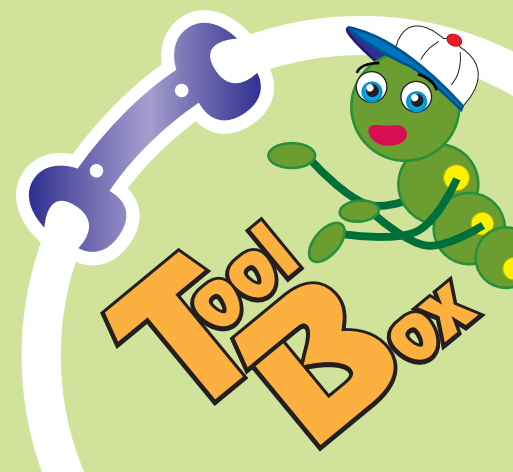
Asks Good Questions: One of the core functions of a mediator is to help new thinking to happen. This is required for the parties to move from confrontation to collaborative problem solving. Asking questions which are open and non-judgemental help this happen.

Understands: Trust is the core to any mediation process and understanding what people are going through is key to this. Mediators do not need to agree with either side. Their understanding comes from understanding the experience that the parties are going through.

Helps finds solutions: The role of mediator also focuses on trying to reach a mutually beneficial agreement. This can be hard for kids to do first time but stick with the process and they will learn. The process is designed to be future focused and encourages participants to think in a new way. It works because they do it themselves and go through the thought process required to make a sustained agreement.

Curly models a lot of ideas you can use yourself. The books show you how these skills can help children change themselves. Have a go yourself and see you get on.

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Use Words

The emotion of Anger triggers our brain in a particular way and can really heat up a row between siblings.

Anger is rooted in our reaction to fight when we are initially alerted to danger. This includes psychological dangers such as fear, frustration, powerlessness, hurt and jealousy.

Possibly the most significant thing that happens when we get angry is the fact that the amygdala in our brain reacts first, before the rest has a chance to click into gear. The adrenalin that the amygdala triggers floods our brain switches off the thinking part of our brain literally before it starts to think.

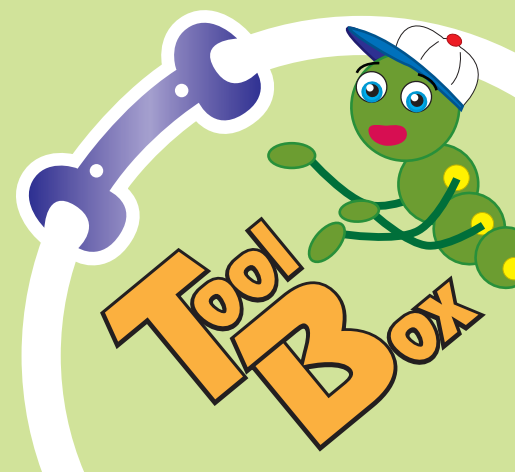
The phrase 'the lights are on but there is nobody at home' can be a very apt description of what happens to us.

The reason this happens is because all our senses go through the amygdala before they get to the rest of the brain. It quite literally has a head start. It can take up to a couple of minutes before we can start to think.

This is why calming down is so important: This is what allows our thinking brain kick into gear and start to work.

Helping brothers and sisters to cool down and turn off the switch so they can talk through their row more calmly and effectively can be hard work. Please see The Resolving Anger Book for plenty of ideas.

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Conflict Iceberg

In the story Gary and Lynsey fight about everything big and small. It looks as if they are rowing over the remote control but what is actually going on is more complicated and to do with their underlying sibling relationship.

When we row we don't find it easy to talk honestly. We can say a lot we don't mean. It is difficult to be honest because we feel under threat. We protect what we really feel so we don't get hurt more.

Understanding that there is more to rows is an important skill to learn. If we only solve what is on the surface, just like cutting off the top of an iceberg, more will pop up from underneath.

This iceberg is a useful way of looking at conflict and can be a good tool to use with your children. Draw a quick triangle and ask the questions in the exercise. Help them sort out what is going on between them underneath all the everyday fights. This will help them start talking about what is really going on.

Listen and Talk

We all know the saying "Jaw, Jaw not War War".

Talking is at the end of the day what we all have to end up doing from industrial disputes, inter-country conflict down to inter-family conflict. It is the only way to finally sort out our differences.

Brothers and sisters growing up together cannot avoid each other or keep on fighting without disrupting the family completely.

Children can be encouraged from a young age to try and find words for how they are feeling and to listen to their brothers and sisters.

Talking effectively is like anything. Over the years the children will improve their skills. Just like any other subject if we can help them learn they will benefit all the more.

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Powerful Questions

When we ask someone a question they have to use the cognitive part of the brain. It encourages the person to move from emotional to thinking, or more realistically a combination of the two.

Nothing beats working things out for ourselves and good questions can help us think for ourselves. When we want to help a child learn and understand it is most effective through a combination of giving knowledge and asking questions to help them think.

If we just tell the other what to think they will not have a chance to think for themselves.

Circuit Breaker

In his book 'Social Intelligence', Daniel Goleman describes how the neuro-scientist Giacomo Rizzolatti discovered 'Mirror Neurons'. These 'Allow us to grasp the minds of others not through conceptual reasoning but through direct simulation; by feeling not thinking'.

It is amazing to think that we react to each other before we have time to think.

Goleman goes on to describe it as 'a brain-to-brain linkage that forms a two-person circuitry via a lower road (than speech).'

This can be great but also it means we can feel each other's emotions when it comes to the emotions of conflict. We all know that feeling of being in the middle of a fight before we realise it.

The duet we create between us can be that of the fight and, with siblings being so familiar with each other, the interaction between them can be all consuming. They can find it impossible to break away from the row. Quite literally they are locked into a hypnotic dance.

If you are intervening between children fighting the first thing you need to do is break the circuit. Step calmly between them and ask them to take three very big breaths. They can also count backwards from ten breathing deeply as they count. Look directly at them so they need to take their eye contact away from the other person and thus break the circuit.

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A Talking Corner

This is an idea that can be useful. It can help establish the habit of sitting down to talk things out. One of our biggest problems in families is the fact that rows go unresolved. This can build up to cause bigger rows in the future.

By encouraging the children to talk about and resolve their rows you are helping to break this habit.

The important elements of this idea are:

1. To find a place that a conversation can happen uninterrupted for a period of time.
2. The place is comfortable.
3. The children associate it with a place to resolve their row and not with the row itself.
4. You can help them Listen and talk to each other.

One of the biggest problems is that row will arise at times of the day when it is impossible to sit down and talk ie: morning times, meals, in the car. It is possible to wait until later when there is a bit of time to sit down. Professional mediators set up mediations around everyone diary so it is normal for conflict resolution to be 'timetabled'.

It can be helpful to wait until later until everyone has cooled down a bit.
(See The Resolving Anger Book)

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Rehearsal Room

Learning to be Conflict Positive (Rehearsal Room)

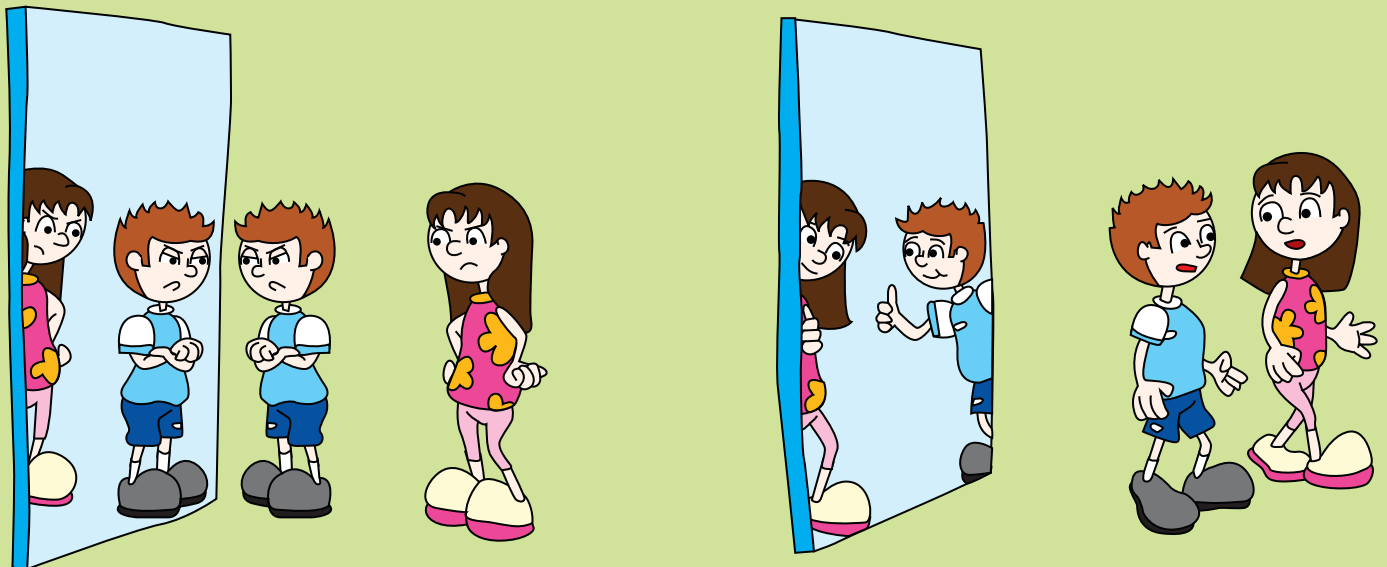
Practice is the cornerstone of any new learning. There is an old saying used by performers: 'It is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration'.

Musicians and sportspeople have training routines that they do everyday. These are built on small exercises that are repeated over and over again. The repetition trains the brain. Slowly the brain rewires to become better for the task in hand.

Neuro-plasticity is the term used by neuro-scientists to describe how the brain changes to facilitate new skills. This can be promoted in our brain through what is commonly known as 'brain training'.

The Rehearsal Room is these books are designed to help this process. Learning from our mistakes and trying to make mini life changes can slowly lead to big changes.

Don't expect your child to change overnight. Stick with it, stay calm and encourage your child to try again.



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