



## How to Create an Anchor Between Two People, By Cara Day

When my kids were littler, I used to want to bottle the hours they were playing and getting along, thick as thieves, so that I could pour some of it back on them when they were at odds.

I thought, “How can I get them to tap into this connected feeling when they are disconnected?” I decided to teach each pair of siblings something they could do to connect their bodies with their emotions—a physical/emotional anchor. The anchor would be a simple gesture they would do with each other that involved some form of physical touch. For example, they could put all of their hands together in a certain way, or each place their hands on the other’s shoulders, or hug in a certain way. They would be able to use this anchor when they were not getting along, as a way to shift themselves to a new space.

Arguments were usually between the boys and between the girls. The boys and girls rarely fought with each other. My two boys are 20 months apart, and the girls are 22 months apart. They have spent all of their time from birth together, with the exception of when they started school and were in class 6 hours per day. That’s a lot of time! They played and played, in pairs, in threes, and with all four, and are all very bonded.

Disagreements naturally occur when you spend large quantities of time with another person. It’s funny that we sometimes expect siblings to get along, but don’t acknowledge that if we, as adults, spent that much time with one person (not of our choosing, by the way), we would get into scuffles, too! Teaching your kids tools they can use to navigate this very intimate relationship is important. The anchor turned out to be a lot of fun.

Although some anchors fell away (because that sibling pair rarely disagreed), the few that were needed really did the trick. As they entered the tween years, they had all learned how to take space from each other and help themselves feel better when they needed a break, whether they did the anchor or not. I call the ability to instinctively notice when space is needed, and then to give the needed space without having to talk about it,

“navigating space”. It’s one key to successful relationships, including marriage, friendships, and professional relationships. You can create an anchor with any person you spend a lot of time with. I will write this scenario for kids so you can try it with yours.

—Pay a lot of attention to when your children are getting along and when they are not. What are the factors? Length of play? Location of play? A particular activity? Is one child the instigator? Who is the peacemaker? It’s important to be aware of the circumstances of both scenarios. Do this for a few weeks.

—Pick a time during or just after two of your children have been getting along and cooperating with each other. It should be a time when they are both in their very best moods. You may have to wait for this time. Be sure to wait—it is best if they are in a very positive, connected, synergistic state when the anchor is created.

—Choose two happy children to anchor. Then say, “Remember this morning when you guys were fighting over who got to sit where at the table, and you were both starting to get mad and were pushing over the seat? Tell me what was going on then. How did that feel?” Let your children share how that felt. (You can skip that step if you think bringing it up will cause a new fight). Next, you can say, “Can you remember a few days ago when you were making the secret passageway in the backyard? You were out there for a few hours. I noticed how you both worked together and negotiated everything beautifully. You were really cooperating. How did that feel?” Let your kids talk about what it was like when they were getting along.

—Now you can introduce the idea of an anchor to your children. Let them know it is a tool that can help two people shift their negative thought patterns when they start to feel irritated or uncooperative. Tell them it’s a good way to remember what really matters and to remind us that we are here to have fun together. Let them know it will be up to them to use it. Tell them the rule is that if one person asks to anchor, the other person should agree to do it. And, let them know that you will ask them to anchor sometimes, and you expect them to cooperate. Tell them they are going to make the anchor and to get ready for some fun.

—Have your children sit or stand, looking at one another. You can say something like this, “I made you so we could have a loving family to play and share with. I want us to live in a home where we are safe to learn and grow. I want everyone here to feel they can make mistakes and still be loved just the same. I want the two of you to know that you will know each other longer than any other person you will know in your life. Longer than you will know me, longer than you will know someone you might get married to. The person standing in front of you is someone for you to love and play with your whole life through.”

—Now, ask them to think of something physical they can do to connect. Let them try a few different things. My kids came up with all kinds of anchors, including putting palms together horizontally in front of them (one with palms up, the other palms down), crossing

their forearms then holding hands, placing one of each of their hands on the heart of the other person with their other hand on the hand of the other person that is on their heart, placing hands on each other's shoulders, and on. This physical gesture is the actual "anchor".

—Once they have an anchor, have them practice it a few times to solidify it.

—At first, the kids will just anchor to have fun with it. That's ok because it helps them to remember the tool. If they start to have a disagreement, you can say, "Why don't you anchor and see if you can start cooperating?" Depending on the ages and personalities of your children, they may easily do the anchor on their own. Others will need more guidance from you. If your children, or one child, is resistant to using the anchor, you can push it a little by saying, "You can do the anchor, or you can have a penalty. It's your choice. I think you'll feel better if you put your energy into making this better rather than into being right." (See page 23, The Choice Chart, to learn about penalties.) You'll have to gauge the situation to determine whether or not you should force the anchor. You don't want to create a negativity toward it, but you also want them to know if they don't use their tool, there may be another, less desired outcome to the situation.

—If your children need some space from each other before they anchor, help them create that. Sometimes in life we need a respite. Once they have had some time apart, they can anchor. Be sure to separately and privately praise each child a little later for their willingness to anchor and the engagement they showed in making your family a fun place to be.

Anchoring is a simple, but powerful tool you can put in your kids' toolbox. They can use it with a best friend, and a spouse when they are grown. They can use it with you. You can use it with your partner or spouse. It's for any two people who really want to be in each other's lives, but sometimes need to be reminded of the love and fun they share.