



Sibling Rivalry

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Sibling rivalry is without a doubt one of the toughest problems parents have to handle in the raising of their children. We all know from our own experiences that our siblings can have a profound effect on our early lives, and these feelings about ourselves can well persist into adulthood. As parents, we want the impact our children have on each other to be only positive. We hope with all our hearts that our children will become trusted, supportive, loving allies on the road of life.

Are there ways to help children get along better? Let me offer a few tips that have been helpful to other parents struggling with the same issues:

1. **STAY COOL** – As difficult as it may be, you must remain calm. If you begin shouting when your children are screaming at each other, the tense atmosphere at home escalates exponentially. If you feel like you might lose your cool, take a self-imposed time out in another room until you can react to the fighting thoughtfully.
2. **ACCEPT YOUR CHILD’S FEELINGS** – Sometimes children say hurtful things in the heat of the moment “I wish he was never born!” “I hate you!” “Why can’t we get rid of her?” It’s tempting for a parent to want to squash these unpleasanties. “That’s ridiculous!” “Oh, just ignore him.” “Don’t be silly. We can’t get rid of her!” Try instead to acknowledge your child’s feelings. When a child feels heard, he/she is more likely to calm down. “I know you get very angry with him sometimes” “When she did that, you must have been mad!”
3. **AVOID COMPARISONS AND LABELS** – Although they can be fertile ground for learning many lessons, sibling relationships can also be prime ground for hurtful comparisons. Don’t compare siblings, even if your children want to. Refrain from using the words “always” and “never”. These labels pigeonhole children into rigid unhealthy roles that are hard to escape from.
4. **TREAT YOUR CHILDREN AS INDIVIDUALS** – One of the hardest lessons for children (and parents) to learn is the myth that siblings can be treated equally. Instead of falling into the trap of trying to make everything equal between your children, focus on each of your children’s unique needs. If your child says, “You bought her a coat, but you didn’t buy me one.” Try asking, “Do you need a new coat? I thought your coat still fits you.”

5. **PAY ATTENTION TO THE INJURED PARTY** – Children want attention from their parents in any way they can get it. They don't care if it's positive or negative. When one sibling appears outright mean to another, it is tempting to reproach the offender. Try instead to focus on the child who is hurt (physically or emotionally). You will be surprised how quickly paying attention to the injured party extinguishes bad behavior on the other sibling's part.

6. **SPEND MORE TIME FOCUSING ON POSITIVES THAN NEGATIVES** – Make your disciplinary statements short and sweet. Focus on the positive interactions between siblings whenever possible. "I am so happy when I see the two of you getting along so nicely."

7. **HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT YOUR CHILDREN CAN WORK IT OUT TOGETHER** – Unless one of your children is in danger of getting physically hurt; allow your children to figure it out. Give yourself permission to go into another room to distance yourself from the commotion.

8. **SCHEDULE FAMILY MEETINGS** – Family meetings are a wonderful way to help your child learn conflict resolution skills. Choose a consistent time each week to meet as a family. Have each person say something encouraging about each family member. After all the positive feelings have been shared, allow each person to gripe about one family member. Encourage positive language and tone of voice. Brainstorm solutions to each problem as a family.