



Sibling Rivalry

Do you have more than one child? If the answer is yes, then you probably have had to play referee more times than you can count. Sibling rivalry, a common issue faced by most parents, has been around as long as there have been brothers and sisters.

Whether you have children of the same age or a few years apart, competition, disagreements and jealousy are bound to occur. As you know, sibling rivalry tests the most tolerant parent's patience.

Of course, parents always hope for a picture-perfect relationship between their children. But the fact is, disagreements between siblings are unavoidable. It is simply a natural part of growing up. Obviously, it's frustrating when your children are loving to each other one minute and ready to pull each other's hair out the next. Let's face it: children are hard to understand at the best of times, and virtually impossible when they fight.

Let your children know that sibling rivalry is normal. Since we're all individuals, unique and different, we won't get along with everyone. We especially won't always get along all the time with those closest to us. Close relationships such as those with brothers and sisters bring challenges, which can cause anger, sadness, frustration and so much more.

A certain amount of sibling rivalry is healthy for children. Trying to do better than their brother or sister is a way children exert themselves. The inevitable bickering that accompanies sibling rivalry teaches your children to stand up for themselves in the schoolyard, as well as helps them learn important life lessons like being assertive and how to solve problems.

Sibling rivalries may exist over privileges older children have, such as staying up later, getting to have friends over more often, or simply having more freedom to do things.

Meanwhile, your younger children are likely to be bossed around by their older brothers or sisters, be compared to those siblings, and at times have a hard time breaking away from the stigma of always being stuck at the kiddie table.

Let them know, being the youngest can be a positive. While they may never get to sit in the front seat, they often get to do things at an earlier age than their siblings did. Also, you're likely to be more relaxed towards them and, therefore, easier on them.

So what can you do to keep the peace? The faster you get to the root of the problem between your kids, the easier it will be to tackle the issue. These arguments between siblings get old really fast?

Figure out what is causing the problem. Kids crave affection. Sometimes just a hug or some other display of affection might resolve, or at least ease the problem. Most kids want to establish their individuality – that they are different from their sibling – and you need to recognize and appreciate this.

Keep in mind that sometimes kids fight to get a parent's attention. In that case, consider giving yourself a time-out. When you leave, the incentive for fighting is gone.

Don't let your kids make you think that everything always has to be equitable. Sometimes one child needs more than the other. If you treat your children fairly and dole out rewards and punishment as they are earned or deserved, they will

learn to respect you and be less resentful when one receives more attention at a particular time. Children don't always need to be treated equally, but they do need to be treated uniquely.

What causes sibling rivalry?

While the causes of sibling rivalry in one family are almost never the same in another, here are some common causes:

- Jealousy
- New baby
- Competition
- Feelings of unequal treatment
- Older child receiving more privileges/getting to do more than the younger sibling

Ways to manage rivalry between your children:

- Make sure each child is given plenty of love.
- Spend enough individual time with each child.
- Avoid comparisons.
- Listen to both sides of the story.
- Don't dismiss one child's feelings over another's.
- Try to let the children work it out themselves.
- Praise your children when they play well together.

Tips:

Sibling rivalry won't go away, but here are a few ideas for handling it in your home.

- **Nip it in the bud.** The earlier an issue is resolved, the better. Get to the root of the problem. It might seem a tough task to control sibling rivalry but if you use the right strategies hopefully you will see it dwindle over time.
- **Let them work it out.** Resist the urge to get involved. Removing yourself from the situation is the best way to handle disagreements between your children. This will allow them time to figure out how to work together – or not!
- **Be reasonable and fair.** While you can't treat all of your children exactly the same because of their different ages and needs, you can be fair. When one child has a gift or accomplishes something special such as getting straight A's on his report card or coming in first at the swim meet, show your pride, but also be mindful of your other child's feelings. Find a way to highlight her special talents at another time.
- **Don't compare siblings or play favorites.** Control the impulse to say, "Why can't you be more like your sister?" It will only drive a wedge between your children.
- **Control how you react to your children's fighting.** When you must intervene, make sure you stay calm. If you're angry, you actually make it more likely that fighting will occur again.



- **Give equal punishment when they misbehave.** If the consequences are the same for each child involved in the squabble, they will think twice about their actions.
- **Be a role model.** You and your spouse need to be a good example of how two family members should treat each other. If your kids see you arguing and calling each other names, it's hard to get across the message that they should get along with their brothers and sisters.
- **Set house rules.** Keep them simple: "no shouting; no hurting, hitting, kicking, or biting; no name-calling; no taking someone's stuff without permission." Also, set a zero-tolerance policy for physical or verbal aggression.
- **Hold a family meeting.** Invite everyone to come up with solutions. Write down each child's feelings
- **Post a schedule.** If your children frequently squabble over the same things (such as video games or dibs on the TV remote), a schedule will help settle that. It will let each child know whose turn it is for that item at what times during the week. However, if they continue to fight about it, take the "prize" away altogether.

Resources:

- *Siblings Without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together so You Can Live Too*
 - http://www.amazon.com/dp/0380799006?tag=childdevelopme09&link_code=as2&creativeASIN=0380799006&creative=374929&camp=211189
- *Understanding Sibling Rivalry - The Brazelton Way*
 - http://www.amazon.com/Understanding-Sibling-Rivalry-Brazelton-Way/dp/0738210056/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245771904&sr=1-8
- *Birth Order Blues: How Parents Can Help Their Children Meet the Challenges of Birth Order*
 - http://www.amazon.com/dp/0805052100?tag=childdevelopme09&link_code=as2&creativeASIN=0805052100&creative=374929&camp=211189
- About Sibling Rivalry
 - http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/sibling_rivalry.html
- Sibling Rivalry: Resolving Jealousy and Competition
 - http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/47394/sibling_rivalry_resolving_jealousy.html?cat=25
- Reducing Sibling Rivalry
 - <http://www.drspock.com/article/0,1510,3965,00.html>