



Sibling Rivalry

Tips to Help Siblings Get Along

- Encourage siblings to express their feelings about one another with words. “I feel sad when you take my toy without asking.”
- Teach children how to get attention from their siblings in a positive way, such as asking to play together. “I’m building a block tower. Do you want to help?”
- Notice and share the positives. The behaviors you notice and talk about are often the behaviors children learn to repeat.
- Don’t take sides. Try to stay neutral when children are having a conflict.
- Create a space where children can have quiet time and space if they need it. Teach all family members to respect these “quiet time” spaces. Model this behavior for your children.
- Try to spend alone time with each child every day. Focus your attention on your special relationship with each child. Make it part of your routine.
- Actively avoid comparing children.
- Allow each child to develop their own interests.
- Avoid older/younger sibling responsibilities (“You are the older one, you need to share”).

Benefits of Sibling Rivalry

Conflict is natural in close relationships like families; and sibling rivalry is part of life. Learning how to resolve conflict with siblings provides a great opportunity for children to practice interpersonal skills, which will continue to benefit them in future relationships.



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Celebrate the Individual

Sibling rivalry becomes negative when adults make comparisons between children (“Your brother is really good at helping.”). Instead, recognize, accept, and enjoy children’s distinct characteristics and achievements. Let each child know that they are special in their own way.



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Resolving Conflicts

Give children opportunities to try working out their own conflicts, but keep in mind that younger children might need some help from you on problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Once everyone has cooled down, you might ask each child to think of several ways to solve the problem. For example, instead of telling the child to “Ask nicely for the toy,” ask, “What can you do or say so your brother will let you play with his truck?” Sometimes that’s all a parent needs to ask.

For other conflicts, you may need to help children think through how their actions made their siblings feel and identify different actions that would make everyone feel better. “How does your brother feel when you grab toys?” “Can you think of something different to do so your brother won’t feel mad?” This problem-solving approach can benefit children in the long term because children are more likely to carry out their own ideas and develop problem-solving skills.

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