



How To Manage Sibling Rivalry

It is human nature to feel competitive and envious toward others. A moderate spirit of competition is a positive and productive attribute in school and in business.

Sibling rivalry is a normal part of growing up in families. The competition between siblings starts when the second child is born. Unfortunately, many parents ignore it and some even make the situation worse.

When occasional fighting becomes a constant series of arguments and fights, it must be dealt with to avoid years of discord and even potential danger.

Here are some tips that will help you lessen your frustration over argumentative brothers and sisters and help them learn to get along better.

Do your best to offer each of your children equal amounts of praise and attention. This is true if they are competing for your attention or if they are participating in a school or sports activity.

Encourage your children to participate in activities that they truly enjoy. Don't expect them to always join activities that they must do together or where they will be competing against each other.

Children sometimes perceive that their parents favor one child over the others. While some parents do prefer one child to the others, it is usually not a conscious choice.



If your child tells you that you favor his or her sibling, pay attention to your behavior; maybe there is some truth to it. However, if you know you are being fair or if there is a valid reason for treating one child differently, stand firm. Sometimes children use the "favorite child" complaint as a way to make you feel guilty and give them what they want.

Sometimes one child is more cooperative or better behaved than another. It's normal to compare siblings, but it's generally better not to talk about it. Comparing two kids doesn't help improve their behavior; instead, it intensifies the sense of envy and jealousy. A more constructive strategy is to limit your comments to the problem behavior. Always avoid telling one child that his or her sibling does something better.

Make it a rule that family members may become involved in incidents between siblings only if they actually saw what happened. This keeps people from being manipulated.

Realize that younger children can be the aggressors. Don't automatically rush to their defense.

If two kids are fighting over a toy, take it away. This discourages them from arguing over who can play with what.

When two kids are fighting, make them share a chair and look at each other in a mirror. With all the goofy faces they make in the mirror the disagreement is soon forgotten and they are laughing like best friends.

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If the kids continue the fight after a few minutes in the chair, assign them a chore to do. The excess energy they are directing toward each other is soon put to better use setting the table or picking up the toys.

Use the Active Listening technique to allow siblings to express their feelings. When kids fight, parents often try to talk children out of their feelings by saying things like *“Stop arguing with Tony, Sarah. You know you love your brother.”*

Instead, you could acknowledge the child’s feelings by saying, *“Sounds like you’re pretty upset with Tony.”* You might be surprised to see that this defuses the emotion and enables Tony to move on to something else.

When you give things to children, base your choices on their individual needs and interests. If you try to avoid arguments by giving equal gifts to each child, they will inevitably find something about them that is unfair.

When your children are in an argument, avoid taking sides. If you can, encourage them to work out their differences. It is almost impossible to try to determine who started a fight.

Even if you know who started the argument, taking sides only makes things worse. If your children learn that you will not enter their minor disagreements, they will have to learn to settle things between themselves.

Take a parent education instructor course. As you educate yourself about parenting, you will change some of your attitudes toward your children and learn new ways to interact with them. You can have the kind of family you want if you are willing to work at it, make some changes in your own behavior, and be patient for things to improve.


You may think that rivalry will stop magically if only you learn to do the right thing. However, learning new behaviors takes a lot of time and persistence.

It is important to address the issues of sibling rivalry

when children are young, because it can intensify and persist as children become adults. It is important not to give up when you feel frustrated. Things may even seem like they are worse before they start to improve.

Because of your efforts and persistence, your children will learn how to get along better. That will prepare them to have productive relationships in the future.



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