



# SIBLING

# RIVALRY

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If you have more than one child, or if you have a sibling, you will already know that fighting between siblings is very common. A certain amount of arguing between children in families is normal. It is also of the ways that children learn the importance of sorting out problems independently, as well as how to respect other people's feelings and belongings. Learning how to fight fairly without hurting each other also helps children learn to settle disputes in future relationships. Here are some tips to help you manage sibling rivalry in your family.

## What are the Common Causes of Sibling Rivalry?

**Jealousy** and **competition** are the main causes for sibling rivalry and fighting. Rates of sibling rivalry are lower in families where children feel they are treated equally by their parents. Other factors also influence how often kids fight and how severe the fighting gets, these include:

- **Toddlers** are naturally protective of their toys and belongings, and are learning to assert their will, which means they may react aggressively if a toy is taken or they do not get their way.
- **School-age kids** often have a strong concept of fairness and equality, so might not understand why siblings of other ages are treated differently or feel like one child gets preferential treatment.
- **Teenagers** are developing a sense of individuality and independence, and might resent helping with household responsibilities, taking care of younger siblings, or even having to spend time together.
- **Gender and age:** sibling rivalry is most likely to occur when the children are of the same gender and close together in age.
- **Sibling with special needs:** a child may pick up on the amount of time and energy their sibling receives, and act out on this disparity for attention due to lack of understanding of the situation.
- **Parental modelling:** the way in which parents resolve conflicts and problems has a significant impact on the way that children interact and resolve their own conflicts. For instance, when parents resolve their issues in a respectful and productive manner, the likelihood that the children of such parents will adopt these techniques is significantly increased.

## What to Do When the Fighting Starts

- **Don't get involved.** Seriously, don't! Step in only if there's a danger of physical or excessive emotional harm. If you always intervene, you risk creating other problems. The kids may start expecting your help and wait for you to come to the rescue rather than learning to work out the problems on their own.
- **Keep your cool.** Charging into a war zone and yelling "Stop it right now!" might shock your kids into silence, but it won't prevent them from resuming their dispute as soon as you leave the room.
- **Praise your children** for handling their problems after the problem has been resolved. If you have concerns with how things went, now is the time to talk about it. If you want to make this a learning experience, wait until the emotions have died down.

### If you must get involved...

- **Separate kids until they're calm.** Often it's best to give your kids space for a little while and not immediately rehash the conflict. Otherwise, the fight can escalate again.
- **Be a coach, not a ref.** Don't focus on figuring out which child is to blame. Tell your kids that it takes two to fight and that you are not interested in the specifics.
- **Teach negotiation.** For example, when they both want the same toy or to watch a different TV show, coach them on how to compromise and to set up rules and parameters.

## Preventing Sibling Rivalry

- Spend **special time** with each child on a regular basis to avoid sibling rivalry.
- Provide children with their **own space and time** to do their own thing. For example, to play with toys by themselves or to own something special that they don't have to share.
- Refer to your children as a **team** as often as possible. "you're such a good cleaning crew." Set joint goals and chores, such as cleaning a bathroom together, baking brownies, or working towards a shared reward. Siblings who feel like they're working together, rather than being opponents, will naturally help each other out.
- Lots of sibling conflicts occur because kids don't know the **proper way to express what's bothering them**. The more words a child has to describe her feelings, the more likely she is to stay calm. Rather than waiting until your kids are upset to have a discussion, take advantage of teachable moments.
- Research has shown that siblings who **have fun together** are closer as adults than those that do not. Provide opportunities for your kids to enjoy each other's company even if there is the risk a fight will develop.
- **Never compare your children.** This is tempting at times, but resist the urge - it can lead to resentment that lasts long after your children's childhood squabbles have been put to rest.
- The book ***Siblings without Rivalry*** by Farber & Mazlish is an exceptional resource for parents.