

Tool Box Tip # 11 Sibling Rivalry

The word 'sibling' refers to brothers and sisters, and 'sibling rivalry' means the competitive feelings and actions that often occur among children in a family. There are things that you can do to try to reduce sibling rivalry.

Most likely your children's relationship with their siblings will eventually develop into a close one. Working things out with siblings gives your children a chance to develop important skills like cooperating and being able to see another person's point of view.

- Treat each child as an individual. Help children understand that they are treated differently by us and have different privileges and responsibilities because they are different individuals.
- Respect each child's space, toys, and time when he wants to be alone, away from his sibling.
- Avoid labeling or comparing one child to the other. This feeds into their competitiveness.
- When a new child comes into the family, adequately prepare the older sibling for their new important role.
- Play detective. Watch and note when siblings are not getting along (before dinner, in the car, before bed) and plan separate quiet activities for those times.
- Watch how you treat each child to see if you are contributing to the rivalry. Make sure you are not playing favorites.
- Have realistic expectations of how they should get along, cooperate, share, and like each other.
- Positively acknowledge them when they are getting along or when they solve their own conflicts. Model positive ways to solve conflicts e.g. compromise, respect one another, divide things fairly.
- Make each child feel special and important. Try to spend one-on-one time with each child every day.
- Take time out to re-energize yourself. Remember, sibling rivalry is a normal and expected part of family life.
- Children who are hungry, bored or tired are more likely to start fights.

How can I help my children get along better?

- Plan family activities that are fun for everyone. If your children have good experiences together, it acts as a buffer when they come into conflict. It's easier to work it out when you share warm memories with someone.
- Make sure each child has enough time and space of their own. Children need chances to do their own thing, play with their own friends without their sibling, and they need to have their space and property protected.

Remember each child is trying to find who they are as an individual. As they discover who they are, they try to find their own talents, activities, and interests. They want to show that they are separate from their siblings.

Sources: Elizabeth Pantley, author of Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting @ 2002. www.pantley.com/elizabeth
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