

Reduce Sibling Rivalry



Sibling rivalry refers to expressions of resentment, jealousy, or hostility between children who view themselves as competitors for the love and affection of their parents. It is most likely to occur if parents

- (1) show favoritism,
- (2) fail to give adequate attention and affection to each child,
- (3) are over-indulgent toward one while being over-strict with another,
- (4) verbally compare one child to another,
- (5) exhibit energy, joy, enthusiasm, or excitement over one child but are bland, matter of fact, or adopt a “business as usual” attitude when interacting with another child.

Following are practices that some parents use to reduce sibling rivalry:



PERSONAL SPACE:

Respect each other's space (bedroom, homework spot, play space). Where children share a bedroom, determine spots that are personal and areas that require compromise. Require that each family member request permission to enter into another's personal space. If disagreements become physical, send each child to her personal space.

UNIQUENESS:

Discuss how you only want one Anya and one Cora; not two Anyas or two Coras. Assure that each are loved as unique individuals; not for being more like the other one. Explain that you love Anya just as much as Cora but because they are two different people, you sometimes do different things with each of them to honor their uniqueness.

Try to develop each child's special interests or personality without forcing one to adopt the interests of the other. Encourage your child to concentrate on her own talents; not to focus on her sibling's. Help your child to see that all people have strengths and weaknesses. Help your child to identify his/her own pluses and crosses. Have similar discussions over cartoon characters or story book characters.

IT'S MY TURN:

Negotiate a system for who gets first choice in any matter that arises on a given day. For instance: (1) in a two-child family, one gets even numbered days; the other gets odd number days. In a three-child family, Monday-Thursday, Tuesday-Friday, Wednesday-Saturday. (2) Keep a deck of playing cards handy. High card (or low card) gets first choice. (3) Toss a coin. (4) When neither child will give in, assign ten minutes for one child's desire and ten minutes for the other child's wish. (5) Draw Lots, i.e., whichever child blindly selects the "number one," he/she chooses the activity for the first half hour, etc. Or keep a container with name-labeled popsickle sticks. Whenever the children are rivaling over whose turn it is, pick a stick. Or roll a die.

NO FAIR!:

Teach your children that because of age and need differences they may not be treated *equally* but that they are all treated *fairly*. For instance, "Kathie received more presents than Ronnie but the same amount of money was spent on each child. Kathie's wish list had less expensive items than Ronnie's list." One child does not necessarily get what the other gets. Base decisions on what is best for each child individually and let them know how you arrive at your decisions. When your child accuses, "No Fair! I didn't get to do that", point out things he has done or received that the other one has not. Consistently point out age difference and state, "At your age his bedtime was eight o'clock. When you are his present age you, too, can stay up until ten o'clock."

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Do not speak to one child about another child unless it is about positive qualities. Sometimes it is necessary to help the "stronger" child to understand that your use of lowkey praise in front of his siblings is to safeguard their feelings of inferiority.



SETTLING CONFLICTS:

Generally, let siblings work out their own differences. Do not take sides. Avoid getting emotionally hooked. Do not allow yourself to be manipulated by a child who provokes a fight, gets hurt, and then acts like the innocent victim in order to get the other sibling in trouble. Keep a clock on hand or a timer. Establish the custom that they have a given amount of time to settle the issue. If they cannot resolve matters by the deadline, then the item is removed from both of them, no matter who is at fault.