

Sibling rivalry

Sibling rivalry is a normal part of growing up



For families with more than one child, sibling rivalry is bound to become a source of frustration for parents from time to time. Even the most compatible and loving siblings may occasionally compete with each other for dominance or parental attention.

Sibling rivalry stems from a child's need for security. Children need to know where they "fit" in the family structure. They need to know that they are loved and valued, not only by their parents, but by their siblings as well. Sometimes, sibling rivalry is as much about getting a brother or sister's attention as it is about getting a parent's attention. Sibling rivalry also can reflect a need for control. Picking on a sibling can provide a sense of power.

Even though parents may find it frustrating, sibling rivalry is a normal, natural, and – in most families – an expected part of growing up. The good news is that rivalry is important to a child's development. It teaches children how to take action and be a leader. When managed effectively rivalry also can teach children problem-solving and cooperation skills.

What parents can do

- ♥ Don't expect children to get along all the time.
- ♥ Don't place undue blame on one child over another. It is usually the increasing conflict that comes to your attention, and often there is no way to know who did what to whom.
- ♥ Turn the tables and have the children solve the problem. Ask each child to share one way he or she might solve the argument or make the situation better. After each child has shared an idea, ask each child to come up with one more idea. Usually one child will agree to the other child's idea.
- ♥ Calling time-out is a good way to end a disagreement. When discipline is necessary, do it fairly.
- ♥ Spend special time with each child individually by doing something each child is good at and enjoys.
- ♥ Never appear amused or flattered by your children's competition for attention.
- ♥ Talk about discipline and behavior with other adults in the household to be sure children are getting consistent messages about what is appropriate and what is not.
- ♥ Don't play favorites. Siblings usually compare themselves and detect discrepancies, real or imagined, in the way parents treat them.
- ♥ Keep household rules consistent for all children and develop additional age-appropriate expectations.
- ♥ Avoid comparing one child to another. Each is a unique individual with his or her own strengths. Focus on each child's assets.
- ♥ Praise children when they play well together, and reward them for sharing and cooperating.
- ♥ Ignore tattling. Tell children to play separately if they cannot get along or encourage they find a different activity.