

Do your kids always fight, squabble
& compete...could it be

Sibling Rivalry?

"Get out of my room!" "It's mine. Give it back!"

"I want the red cup!" "I'm going first!"

Sound familiar? Every household with children has some squabbling and competition. But does it get too much, drive you mad, and spoil nice family days out because the kids won't stop bickering?

It could be a bad case of **sibling rivalry**.

Sibling relationships are the longest most people will have in their lifetimes. Brothers and sisters usually feature within your earliest memories, and they are also likely to be part of your life until the time of your – or their- death. Some siblings never get on, and in other families they are a life long strength to each other.

So how do we encourage our children to put petty squabbles and competition aside, and nurture a good relationship between brothers and sisters?

Child magazine investigates.

What is sibling rivalry?

Most brothers and sisters experience some degree of jealousy or competition, and this can flare into the squabbles and bickering that we refer to as sibling rivalry. This is not unique to humans – it is visible in many animal groups that raise several young at the same time – only their young are often fighting for a share of the food.

Why do children fight?

There are many factors that can cause tension between siblings:-

Jealousy:- Wanting the parent's attention, wanting the biggest slice of cake, wanting to be 'first'. Children can feel everything is a competition.

Personality:- If a family has more than one child who is low on patience, fussy, tense, easily frustrated, and generally intolerant there is more likely to be conflict.

Model behaviour:- Children copy their parents - so if their parent is impatient and aggressive when dealing with problems, their children will imitate this behaviour with their siblings.

Sibling Rivalry...

What's the problem?

The first step is to understand what lies behind competitive behaviour – they will reveal the feelings children are having. Ask the child about their feelings and listen to what they say.

Often the eldest child may feel threatened and challenged in areas they used to be best at. Younger siblings may feel they do not get the one to one attention they seek.

One child may belittle another's achievements with comments like 'anyone can do that'.

Can sibling rivalry be useful?

Conflict among siblings can teach children useful life skills. It gives young children the chance to learn to compete in the safety of the family home. Animals also display this behaviour.

Children from larger families will usually learn very quickly to take turns, share, and also the ability to compromise and negotiate with their siblings from an early age.

Children can also learn to value each other's opinions and recognize that individuals have strengths and weaknesses.

How to Stop Sibling Rivalry

★ Boredom can sometimes promote rivalry so keeping children amused can be a preventative strategy

★ Identify what triggers the squabbles – if there is something that is always happening – a battle to sit in the front on car journeys, having the remote control, or what to watch on television – make a rota so they each have their 'turn' or get to watch their favourite programme. Stick to it.

★ Try and get them to work it out for themselves – let them set the rules and they are more likely to feel happy with them.

★ Let siblings express their feelings – ask them how they are feeling and encourage them to talk it through rather than snatch, grab, shout or hit out.

★ Encourage both sides to value the other's perspective and think about how the other person feels.

★ Don't take sides in sibling fights. Instead let children work out their differences, as taking sides will only make it worse. If they know you won't take sides they will soon start solving minor differences themselves. Intervene only to prevent injury.

★ If forced to intervene, use the minimum of words but set clear boundaries.

★ Don't try and find out who started the fight – you never will.

★ Don't compare siblings – it doesn't encourage good behaviour, it just feeds feelings of jealousy and envy.

★ Avoid telling one child that a sibling is better at something.

★ Praise all children for good behaviour.



★ Acknowledge each child's strengths without comparison.

★ Don't have too high an expectation of older children – they will need love, affection and to be indulged sometimes too.

★ Help competitive children by identifying their strengths and developing their confidence in their own unique abilities.

★ Make sure every child understands that though different, their talents are equally valued by both their parents.

★ Persevere – it will take time, get worse before it gets better, but consistency and staying power are necessary.

★ Show children how to find solutions to daily problems and disagreements in ways that are respectful, productive and not aggressive.

★ Adopt a family 'zero tolerance' rule to name-calling, hitting, and aggressive behaviour. Keep to it.

★ Create opportunities for the whole family to spend time together and have fun.

★ Reduce the amount of violent or aggressive TV or films your children watch – research shows exposure can increase aggressive behaviour among children.

★ Encourage children to come up with their own solutions to the conflict.