

EXTENSION UPDATE

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Sibling Relationships – Friend or Foe

Children first learn about different points of view from interacting within their family. Sibling relationships provide opportunities to test social behaviors. These relationships are a way to learn how certain words and actions can affect another person.

Sometimes siblings do not always agree and conflict can arise. Other times siblings seem to be in constant competition with each other. Parents can help manage sibling rivalry and improve sibling relationships. The following are a few suggestions.

- Spend time with each child. This special time alone with each child won't happen very often in today's busy world unless this time is planned.
- Recognize and accept that each child is different. Uniqueness is a strength, not a weakness. Differences enrich our lives.
- Praise children for being what they are, not for what they can do.
- Avoid initiating competition among siblings. Comparative remarks such as "highest grades" and "cleanest room" tend to create a negative feeling toward the parent and the child's sibling.
- Don't overemphasize sharing. Everyone needs to feel ownership of something. Children need to learn how to share, but they should also be given the privilege to decide whether to share some things.
- Be aware of the stereotypes and parental expectations, for example the "oldest child" and "the baby of the family."

- Talk with your child about fighting. Help children understand why they fight and how to prevent it.
- Believe in the potential of sibling conflicts. Children learn how to get along with others from such disagreements.

Sibling rivalry and conflict are not pleasant experiences for parents. The above suggestions can make a difference, but developing social skills takes time. Managing sibling rivalry is not easy.

Fighting can become a habit and habits are not easily broken. The united efforts of parents and the giving of lots of love and concern, along with the above suggestions, can help children improve relationships with siblings.

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