



UNITED
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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Family Feud: Strategies for Handling Sibling Rivalry

Chances are your kids are going to grow up as each other's friends, confidants and protectors. But at times they'll also be dreaded enemies and competitors. A little rivalry is not always a bad thing, provided parents keep on their toes and see it for what it is: a necessary, natural part of growing up.

There's no way around it.

Brothers and sisters fight for all sorts of reasons, starting with the fact that they want the same thing: the love, attention and approval of their parents.

Competition is a natural instinct, as is the simple teasing which starts many

children's arguments—it helps kids learn how other people operate emotionally. Also, there's no denying we live in a competitive society where we're told to win and be the best. Of course your children are going to be jealous of each other from time to time.

It's important to remember that the bickering is not anyone's fault—not the oldest kid's or the youngest kid's or yours, as a parent. Conflict is simply going to arise; that's the way it works.

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Tips for Discipline

Set clear expectations.

Make sure your kids understand what comprises acceptable behavior. Don't simply tell them what not to do—give them ideas for what they should be doing.

Give praise. Discipline is not just about punishment. By rewarding good behavior, you're likely to see more of it. Be specific in your praise. Rather than saying merely "good job," tell your child exactly what he or she did right: "I'm proud of you for sharing the toy with your brother."

Take a time-out. Depending on your child's age, time-outs can give children a quiet moment in which to think about their behavior. It may help to give both arguing children a time-out, regardless of who "started it," as this can emphasize the importance of cooperation.

Upcoming Articles

July 2008

Fitness, Foods and Moods

August 2008

Breaking Up Is Hard to Do



What Can I Do?

For parents dealing with sibling rivalry, keep some basic principles in mind.

Never play favorites.

Even if you see yourself in one child, or feel you understand one better than the other, never allow your children to feel or see any favoritism.

Try not to take sides.

Parents of fighting kids often punish the “at fault” child, who is often the dominant personality. But there are two sides

to every story. Often it’s impossible to truly tell who “started it.”

Avoid making comparisons between children.

Comparing kids — “Look at how neat your brother is” — will only make more competition.

Validate your child’s feelings.

Anger may quickly disappear if a child knows you recognize and understand their frustrations. Children often need parents to name their feelings: “That made you mad, didn’t it?”

Step in when necessary.

If the same argument keeps happening or if the fight puts one or both children in danger, step in. Ask the kids for their ideas on how to resolve it. If the situation is getting violent, make it clear to both children that letting things get to this point is never OK. Separate the children and wait until they’ve both calmed down. Then, and only then, listen to what each child has to say, and together try to come up with a solution.



For some families, conflict is ever-present and difficult to manage. You may feel overwhelmed by the struggle to keep the peace. If this is the case for you, don’t hesitate to get support. UBH is here to help. Call or log on anytime for help with any of life’s challenges.

Why Is It Worse With Some Kids?

A variety of factors determine which kids have a harder time sharing, and what might lead to tension around the house.

Temperament — Some kids are naturally more easygoing and willing to play well with others, which tends to win them praise. Others may have a more difficult or forceful personality, and may find ways to get attention through “problem behavior.”

Gender — In general, rivalry is reduced when two children are of the opposite sex. With two boys or two

girls, there’s more pressure to be different, to be better than one another and find ways to compete for a parent’s affection.

Age Difference — It’s extremely difficult for toddlers less than three or four years old to share anything, much less grasp that parents have enough love to go around. When a new baby is born, toddlers often have the hardest time. Also, sibling rivalry sometimes becomes more obvious when kids are older and more directly in competition (playing the same games, going to the same school, etc.)

Understanding the factors that contribute to sibling rivalry may make it easier to handle. When you know what’s behind your kids’ behavior, you’re more likely to deal with it calmly and confidently.



Resources

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

www.liveandworkwell.com

Use the search phase “sibling rivalry” for more information on helping kids deal with conflict.