Helping Siblings Get Along

All siblings argue now and again. Frequent, intense fights should be avoided. Positive relationships begin at home.

What are some causes of sibling rivalry?

- Children may believe that there is not enough attention, recognition, or time for everyone. They feel the need to compete for those things.
- Children may get the idea that they are in a contest when parents compare one child to another: "Sit quietly like your brother does."

What can a parent do about sibling rivalry?

- Avoid comparing one child to another.
- Listen to the children's complaints to get clues to what the "rivals" believe is in short supply: "Dad always hugs Kendra first!"
- Let children know you understand their feelings even though you don't agree with them: "Yes, your brother needs more help getting dressed than you do, but you are just as important to me as he is."
- Spend some time alone with each child doing something they really enjoy. Just 10 minutes taking a walk, reading stories, or playing catch can do wonders.
- If one child says unkind things to you about another, remind them that all siblings are part of the family, even if they are sometimes annoying. That response reassures the child that they would still belong to the family even if a sibling was upset with them.
- Do not worry about treating all your children exactly alike. Children need comfort, help, and encouragement at different times and in different ways. When a child questions the attention you give to their sibling, reassure them that when they need attention, you will provide it.

What can parents do about quarrels?

- Keep in mind that you don't have to get involved in every sibling argument. Children can often work things out themselves.
- If your children's quarrels bother you, step in calmly. If you tell them to stop, stay involved until the problem is resolved. Listen carefully to each child. This is an opportunity to model how to resolve conflicts.
- Avoid lecturing or nagging children about their arguments.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC).

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