

Helping Siblings Get Along



All siblings argue now and again. But if your children have frequent, intense fights, you do not have to just stand by and let them treat each other badly. Brotherhood and sisterhood can begin at home!

What are some causes of sibling rivalry?

- Rivalry may occur when children believe that there's not enough of what they need or want to go around. They may feel they have to compete for parents' attention, affection, recognition, or time.
- 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 he or she really enjoys: taking a walk, reading stories, playing catch—10 minutes a day for a week can do wonders.
- If one child says unkind things to you about another, remind him that "she's still one of us" no matter how annoying she is sometimes. That response reassures the child that *he* would still belong to the family even if a sibling had ill feelings toward *him*.
- 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 her sibling, reassure her that when she needs help, 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, calmly step in. 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.
- Remember that children often push you to exercise your authority. By his or her behavior, a child may be saying, "Help me to be the kind of person *you want* me to be! That is the kind of person *I want* to be too—but I need your help to get there."

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 State Board of Education.



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