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How Can I Reduce Sibling Rivalry?

Glen Jenson

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A weekly question/answer column

How Can I Reduce Sibling Rivalry?

Glen Jenson answers:*

Quarreling, pushing, name calling and other negative behaviors between siblings take place in nearly every home at one time or another. Consider these tips to help reduce sibling rivalry in your home.

- Much of sibling rivalry centers around competition for parents' attention. Parents can minimize problems by spending somewhat equal periods of uninterrupted time with each child. Equal treatment, however, is a little more difficult to give because of age or sex differences. Age often has its privileges as well as appropriate responsibilities.
- Parents should consider their relationship with each other. If they are often seen quarreling or bickering with each other, then children might interpret such behavior as also being acceptable for them. If parents use verbal or physical violence as a means of controlling children, then children may assume they can control siblings in a similar fashion. Modeling positive, cooperative behavior will produce much better results.
- Family rules need to be clearly explained and consequences administered if rules are violated. The consequences should be appropriate for the offense. If a child hits another child, denial of a privilege such as watching a favorite TV program would be appropriate. If children are yelling and screaming at each other, try separating them for a period of time in different places in the home to let them cool off.
- As children get older, there should be less need for parental intervention with problem solving among siblings. Older children need their own experience of thinking and carrying out alternatives to quarreling and fighting.

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