

Working Solutions

How to Squelch the Squabbles of Sibling Rivalry

Chances are your kids are going to grow up as each other's friends, playmates, confidants and protectors. They'll also be dreaded enemies, competitors, and adversaries when it comes to getting what they want from mom and dad. Oh, the ongoing battles and daily squabbles probably won't reach the fairy tale proportions of Cinderella and her dreaded stepsisters, but like it or not, children in the same family are going to fight. It's only natural. However, a little rivalry is not always a bad thing, provided parents keep on their toes and see it for what it is: a necessary 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're going after the same thing: the love, time, attention, and approval of their parents. Competition is a completely 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 that 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. So when it all gets to be too much, 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 happen; that's the way it works.

Why is it Worse With Some Kids?

A variety of factors decide which kids are going to have a harder time sharing in a family setting, and what might figure into 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.”

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- **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 different ways to compete for a parent's affection.
- **Age and Age Difference** - When a new baby is born, younger children often have the hardest time. It's extremely difficult for toddlers less than three or four years old to share anything, much less grasp that mom and dad have enough love to go around. 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.).

What Can I Do?

For parents dealing with sibling rivalry, the first step is to understand that all of the above makes each child, and each child's experience as a sibling, different. To play fair, you must realize that your children are not equal. They're all unique individuals. Here are some hints for navigating the sibling rivalry playing field.

- **Appreciate each child's differences.** Treating each child the same way will only make one or the other feel cheated. Maybe an older child should get more privileges, as well as more responsibilities.
- **Never play favorites.** Even if you particularly see yourself in one child and may feel you understand them better than the other, never, never, never allow your children to feel or see any favoritism.
- **Try not to take sides.** Parents of fighting kids often rush to 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.”
- **Validate your child's feelings.** Anger may quickly disappear if a child knows you recognize—and understand—their frustration. Children often need parents to name their feelings: “Did that make you feel angry?” “Do you feel sad?”
- **Don't ignore good behavior.** It's easy to overlook the kid who's not causing a problem. Try shifting the focus and attention away from

bad behavior; rewarding the good will act as a cue for both children.

- **Avoid making comparisons between children.** Comparing kids—“Look at how neat your brother is!”—will only make them more competitive, and can backfire if you're trying to encourage good behavior.
- **Plan activities where everyone can win.** If one kid's an athlete and the other's an artist, weekly games of catch might not be your best bet for family fun. Be creative and find things for everyone's talents.
- **Spend time with each child, and give each his or her own space.** Be sure to regularly make time for each one of your children. It's also important that they have their own space in the house even if it's not a separate room, and are allowed their own privacy.
- **Take turns with privileges,** and tasks. Set a clear schedule for alternating things like riding “shot gun” in the car, choosing a TV program or restaurant, and helping with the dishes or taking out the trash.
- **Whenever possible,** stay out of fights. When left to themselves, kids will often settle their own problems. It might work to simply ignore the argument, to go into another room, or to send the kids outside. Without a referee, fighting isn't as much fun. Sometimes, however, you as parents do have to get involved. You must step in if the same argument keeps happening over and over again, or if the fight is serious and one or both children are in danger. If the situation is getting violent, make it clear to both children that letting things get to this point is never OK. Once the children have calmed down, ask them for their ideas on how to resolve it, once and for all.

Sibling rivalry is never going to be a walk in the park, no matter who's involved or how you handle it. But it doesn't have to rule out a happily-ever-after. And remember, there's a plus side to the struggle: your kids are learning how to deal with disagreements and how to stand up for themselves. So give yourself a break and keep your sense of humor. It will get easier. ■ Source: Accor Services North America, Inc. (2004). Sibling rivalry. Retrieved October 25, 2005, from the Accor Services North America database.

Marriage Counseling: Not Your Last Step

While most married couples experience occasional disagreements and rough patches, the majority view marriage



counseling as a last resort before divorce, when in fact they should see counseling as an early learning tool to help make things better. Emotional abandonment and emotional neglect are two of the most driving factors for the dissolution of a marriage. Spouses often seek counseling when they feel misunderstood, isolated, lonely, frustrated, or deeply hurt. Others may seek counseling when they feel a profound sense of sadness in their relationships. These feelings may not be new; they may have been brewing for years. Couples entering counseling earlier stand a better chance of saving their marriages. Call AWP at 1-800-343-3822 to learn more. ■

Humor in the Workplace

Humor is a great stress-relieving tool, but understanding and using appropriate humor at work will help you and others avoid stress—or, worse, the accusation of harassment or offensive behavior. The bottom line: Negative humor—any joking that insults or is offensive to someone—hurts the workplace environment. Workplace humor tips:

- 1) Avoid humor associated with age, sex, race, ethnic background, weight, or other human characteristics.
- 2) Avoid using humor to make light of emotionally painful situations.
- 3) Avoid humor until you understand a coworker's personality and sensitivities.
- 4) Avoid sarcasm and cynical humor.
- 5) Don't use crude or offensive humor with coworkers even in informal or social settings outside work. ■

Should You Become a Manager?

Ask yourself the following questions, and if the answer to most of them is “yes,” think about applying for a position on the next rung up the ladder.

- **First and foremost**, are you motivated to achieve? Do you feel a need for accomplishment demonstrated by your ability to take the initiative?
- **Second**, do you have good social skills? Working well with different types of personalities depends upon diplomacy, tact, and a talent for successful interpersonal relationships. If you enjoy a variety of relationships, chances are you have the ability to influence others, nurture their abilities, and lead them where you want them to go.
- **Third**, do you communicate well? Good managers instinctively know what to say, as well as how to say it, and when to say it. They keep their bosses informed on key issues so that he or she can adequately explain events to those even higher up in the chain of command.
- **Finally**, have you got what it takes to respond to the needs of the job after hours—weekend e-mails, cell phone calls, unpredictable overtime, work-related thoughts in the shower, dinner-hour interruptions, and perhaps even while on vacation?



Should you become a manager? If you answered “yes,” to these questions, throw in the ability and willingness to learn about managing data and financial figures and you may be ready for life in today's thrifter, faster, and more demanding world of management. ■

Give Your Attitude a Twist

Do you take on more assignments, work longer hours, have better ideas, or possess more problem-solving knowledge than your coworkers? If so, do you also know the secret to staying positive, especially if your pay is no higher than that of your



peers, and leaving is simply not in the cards? Outstanding employees react in various ways to this classic workload inequity stressor, but those who maintain a positive attitude say they focus on what goes right at work rather than experiencing resentment. Their approach involves focusing on the agreeable aspects of their jobs and using affirmative thinking strategies until they become second nature. "Let gratitude be your attitude" might be the most important stress management tool of all. ■

Spring Clean Your Office

Do dust bunnies peek out from behind your desktop PC? Perhaps it's time to spring clean your work space. Fight the inertia of chronic procrastination: set a specific time to attack the mess. Switch from "pack-rat mode" to "purge-and-toss mode." Don't get mad; get even with the clutter that's taken over your life! Tackle one small area on your desk at a time so you don't feel overwhelmed, and finish that area completely before moving on to the next. Alternatively, stack everything in one neat pile and work your way through it. Disarray can interfere with your

productivity, affect your mental health, and even contribute to a reputation you don't want. Maintenance strategy: Tidy up at the end of each day so that you can begin every morning with a clean, organized work space and good feelings that come with it as you step through the door. ■

Become a Self-Starter

If you are a self-starter, your organization knows it: they rely on you to motivate yourself, and to accomplish objectives and goals in line with their mission. Supervisors put less pressure on you because they know you as a creative person who stays focused. As a trusted employee, you require little supervision. To become a self-starter, decide what you want to accomplish. Make it magnificent, and it will motivate you. Always define what you wish to achieve so that as you complete one goal, another takes its place. Continually assess your progress. Make commitments that force you to stay on task and deliver on your promises. Avoid procrastination and distraction—the greatest obstacles to acquiring a reputation as a self-starter. ■



4

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