

Raising Siblings and Reducing Rivalry

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Do your children compete for your attention? Do they argue about sharing toys, and are they pals one minute and enemies the next? Anyone who has more than one child, or who had a sister or brother growing up knows about sibling rivalry.

Most experts agree that the root of sibling competition is a wish for the exclusive love of a parent. Another new child in the family can feel like a threat to the first child's wellbeing.

Many parents will say to their children "there's plenty of love to go around," but on the other hand kids don't always think it's true.

Conflicts are normal, especially when siblings have different temperaments and interests. There are many things parents can do to encourage their children to enjoy each other. Here are some tips for reducing sibling competition and conflict, and increasing cooperation and connection:

When a new baby is born:

- Make sure your older children are with someone they really like while mom is in the hospital.
- When your children come to the hospital to see you and the baby, have your arms free (baby in the crib or in someone else's arms) so you can give them a big hug and kiss.
- Have gifts for the older children, since the baby is sure to get some.
- Accept the older children's feelings about the baby and the ways in which the household has changed. Give older children lots of reassurance that they're very important to you.
- Don't pressure your older children to nurture the baby. It's best if it comes naturally, and in time. Praise them when affection is shown.

All children want alone time with parents:

- A good way to decrease sibling rivalry is to have special time with each of your children.
- This time doesn't have to be an all day event, and it doesn't have to cost money.
- Have special time for 20 or 30 minutes a few times a week where you focus your undivided attention on one child. Follow their interests and enjoy yourself.

Have family time:

- Have regular mealtimes and family rituals that bring siblings together.
- Plan regular family meetings. Communicate rules, chores, and consequences; these will help your children value everyone in the family.
- Don't expect sibling conflicts to go away. They're a normal part of growing up. Your children will get lots of practice in resolving conflicts that will help them with friends and others in the future.
- Avoid comparisons. Fully accept each child's unique style.

Do your best to help your children respect each other. You can't control their relationship, but you can guide them with love.

