

Sibling Rivalry

Parents with more than one child have a challenging task to raise them all to be happy, productive citizens. This article will provide some helpful tips for them to be successful

1. Be consistent. This is key in parenting whether you have one or more children to raise. Children will remember what we do as parents and they will call us on not being consistent. How many times have you heard your child say, "That's not what you said or what you did last time." Consistency validates children. It provides them with a sense of security and gives them boundaries. It sets the tone in the home. If you say bedtime is at 9pm then stick to it. Don't allow your child to change the time unless there are special circumstances and then discuss it, so they know this is the exception and not the rule.
2. Don't compare one child to another. This is a mistake a lot of parents do, and it can truly cause long term damage to your child. Children are looking to form their own identity and to find their place in the world. They need to learn to be authentic and true to themselves. If one child receives better grades than another, encourage the one who is struggling. Look for ways to support them. Do they need tutoring, do they need glasses or more time to complete assignments? Talk openly with the child and their teacher to see if the root of the problem can be identified and addressed. Use praise for the things they are good at and never allow other children to tease their sibling who is struggling with anything. Make some house rules. If it's not encouraging, then don't say it. If you wouldn't want it said to you don't say it to someone else and always consider how what you say will affect others before you speak. If you have made the mistake of comparing your children discuss it with them together. Let them know that as of today we all will not compare ourselves to other people, but we will strive to be the best we can be. A family should be a team and each other's biggest supporters.
3. Don't allow name calling, belittling or bullying in any way. This can be a problem specifically when there are significant age gaps between your children. Older children often have more responsibilities and can sometime resent that. They may have to watch their younger sibling while you work or run errands. This may infringe upon their perceived personal time. Establish a rule that if any bullying occurs in the house there will be a consequence and that name calling only hurts people. As a family you want to build a healthy unit so use praise and encouragement daily. Let the older child know how much you appreciate them and their role as a family member. When you can give them a privilege or reward for their behaviors. Show them the advantages of being older and having more choices. An example would be that they are permitted to stay up later at night than their sibling or maybe they have a cell phone and their younger sibling doesn't. Maybe they can drive, and their siblings aren't of age yet. Also discuss how things become costlier as they age. (My son's name brand sneakers cost more than my daughter's shoes). If violent behavior occurs then a strict consequence should occur to extinguish the behavior. The one who was violent must learn how their behavior is unacceptable and can hurt people. They also need to make amends for their behavior and say they are sorry. Every child must feel safe in their home. The consequence must be strong enough to make a difference.
4. Assign age appropriate chores and responsibilities. A two-year-old can't safely use the microwave, an eleven-year-old can. A five-year-old may not be in charge of the laundry but they can clean their room up. Extra tip" Help your children clean the way you want it and take a picture of it and put it on their room mirror or door as a reminder to them of how it should look.

If they have a cell phone send them the picture so they can have it saved and refer them to it when it is time to clean up. Older children will probably have more to do but reward them with more choices or privileges.

5. Let each child be responsible for something. This gives them a sense of pride and a sense of belonging. It also teaches them responsibility. Chores are not optional but character building. If you need to provide a list of chores put it up in a place everyone can view and check in with them to remind them of their responsibilities. Melissa and Doug have a great resource I use with my own children. My magnetic responsibility chart. It has the days of the week with magnets and chores for each child. Smiley face magnets are used to show completion of the chore. I allow my children to put their own magnet on their day of the week after completion of the chore. This gets them to (buy in) to the responsibility. I do alter the chores weekly. One might load the dishwasher and another unload it. One might set the table and another clear the table.
6. Have weekly family meetings. I call this a Check In Session. This is a time all disagreements and issues in the family can be openly discussed. Establish some ground rules, no over talking, no belittling, aggressive talking, and set a time limit. Allow your children time to discuss their grievances and yes, even against you. They do need to be respectful. Do this at a quiet time of the week. Sunday evenings at my home are best. We are all preparing for the upcoming week and this also unites us as a family. Start with the oldest first then go down in age. Act as a mediator whenever possible and model problem solving with your children. One might say they feel they want more time on the computer and another child monopolizes it and an argument occurs from it. Ask them for their proposed solutions and weigh them with the family. Is it fair and acceptable? In the stated case maybe, an option would be to establish time limits and time slots for each child and if extra time is needed for a project then slate it and they can request it as needed. Maybe one can use the computer, and another can use a tablet or a cell phone for internet usage.
7. Always end the meeting with a position tone. I like to use quotes or personal encouragement. If you establish a routine they will remind you when you fall off track or forget. A parent should remain neutral and not take sides unless personal safety is involved. Parents should not have a favorite child. Yes, one may be easier to handle or be around, but they should all be equally loved and supported. Focus on the positives and work on improving the areas that need development.
8. Teach your children to love each other. I know this seems to be obvious, but it is not. Children have different temperaments and personalities. Not all children are naturally loving. They do all have a loving part of them, but some need more assistance in bringing it to the surface. Tell your children you love them. They need to hear the words. Expressions like, we show love in this family by then pick a way. Maybe by smiling, by spending time together in a fun activity, by saying I love you. By giving a high five or fist bump. The children are creative and will come up with ways.
9. Teach them how to share and to compromise. All children are different and need to learn at their level of competence. One child may naturally share while another refuses. All children go through an egocentric phase (we need to teach them to outgrow it). Give practical examples they can relate to and have experienced. Remember the time you wanted to use the computer to complete your project and your sister was playing a game and you yelled at her to get off it? You don't like to be yelled at she has a right to use the computer the same as you do so what do you think an appropriate response could have been? Talk them through it and assure them you know they can share and make the correct choice to keep the peace in the home.

10. Don't expect perfection. We all make mistakes. Children don't fully have the mental acuity as adults or brain maturity. They are easily agitated, angered and can be impulsive. They are messy and accident prone. They often act first without thinking. Seek the support of a knowledgeable professional if you can't handle it alone or family members or friends. Sometimes parent need a break so go and take it.

The goal is to teach your children to not just live together but to support and love each other as a happy family.