

# ***BUILDING LOVING SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS, WHILE UNDERSTANDING & HONORING EACH CHILD'S TEMPERAMENT***

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS: all of us are born with our own unique temperament. The nine characteristics of temperament are:

Activity level	Distractibility	Persistence
Approach/withdrawal	Mood	
Intensity	Adaptability	Regularity
Sensory Threshold		

Understanding where each person in your family is regarding their innate temperament and learning how to honor each person, will go a long way toward teaching and helping siblings learn how to work together. Never compare siblings to one another; find the positive traits in each sibling. Don't let anyone lock a child into a role (he is the grouchy one; she is the brain in the family, etc.). Modeling this will help build appreciation for each other's skills, uniqueness and capabilities. Every child should be viewed as an only child in his parents' eyes.

## SIBLING DYNAMICS:

\*focus on each child's individual needs, rather than trying to divide yourself equally.

\*be clear and concise with your statements- "I can't let you hit your sister; I won't let anyone hit you"

\*teach your children to negotiate with each other; use the term "taking turns" rather than "sharing"

\*acknowledge negative feelings instead of dismissing them. Insisting upon good feelings between children can lead to resentment.

\*show how angry feelings can be discharged safely (it is ok to hit the pillow)

\*respond to the desire, not the complaint

\*involve your children in problem solving decision making

\*let go of the guilt; guilt is a huge barrier to conscious parenting. From "Loving Each Other Best" by Nancy Samalin

### **ISSUES TO CONSIDER FOR SIBLING CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

\*always emphasize team building; children need to learn how to finish conflict resolution peacefully. Avoid separating children unless absolutely necessary.

\*children have opportunity to choose the safe relationships with siblings to practice the important issues of communication, negotiation and control.

\*in most situation, intervening means walking children through the conflict resolution process.

\*when sibs are helped to find mutual solutions, frustration is replaced by feelings of competence.

\*facilitating conflicts between siblings does not immediately create harmony in the family. A well-functioning household is not necessarily a quiet one.

\*avoid "picking sides"; if we do, we inevitably tip the scale too far in one direction. From Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis & Janis Keyser

### **MORE IDEAS**

\*insisting upon good feelings between children can lead to bad feelings and resentment; acknowledge negative feelings instead of dismissing them.

\*show how angry feelings can be discharged safely. Teach calming strategies: deep breathing/squeezing a stress ball, journaling. Remind them that screaming, calling names, hitting will only escalate the conflict. If they calm down first, they can find a helpful solution.

\*respond to the desire, not the complaint

\*involve your children in problem solving decision making

\*acknowledging bad feelings between the children leads to good feelings...a circuitous route to sibling harmony.

- \*children don't need to be treated equally They need to be treated uniquely
- \*instead of giving equal amounts...give according to the individual need
- \*instead of giving equal time...give time according to need
- \*be clear and concise when making statements
- \*NEVER make comparisons; note the positive in each child; modeling this will help build appreciation for each other's skills, uniqueness & capabilities.
- \*identify your child's best way to be and feel loved; practice filling your children's love tank each day. Check out *The Five Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman & Ross Campbell: quality time/words of affirmation/gifts/acts of service/physical touch
- \*help your children establish personal boundaries; it is helpful to have a place for the older child to retreat if the younger sib cannot understand the need for private time.
- \*make and enforce family rules about boundaries (knock before you enter someone's room; stop when someone says stop.
- \*model and encourage respectful communication.
- \*Believe in yourself, you know your family best. You are the expert when it comes to your children. Trust your instincts.
- \*LET GO OF THE GUILT; IT IS THE NUMBER 1 BARRIER TO CONSCIOUS PARENTING. From *Loving Each One Best* by Nancy Samalin

### **HOW TO HANDLE THE FIGHTING:**

Level I: ignore normal bickering, children are having an important experience in conflict resolution.

Level II: situation is heating up; adult intervention might be helpful

1. Acknowledge their anger
2. Reflect each child's point of view
3. Describe the problem with respect

4. Express confidence in the children's ability to find their own solution
5. Leave the room

Level III: situation possibly dangerous

1. Inquire
2. Let the children know options
3. Respect everyone's feelings

Level IV: situation definitely dangerous; adult intervention as necessary

1. Describe what you see
2. Separate the children

Family Meeting Time

1. Call a meeting of the antagonists; explain the purpose and ground rules
2. Write down each child's feelings, concerns; read them aloud
3. Allow time for rebuttal
4. Invite everyone to come up with solutions; write down all ideas without evaluating
5. Decide upon the solutions you all can live with. From :*"Siblings Without Rivalry; How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too"* by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

## **OTHER THOUGHTS**

\*Even if there is a little bit of fighting, as long as they have affection, the positive will win out. If siblings get in a fight they gave to regulate emotions. That's an important skill to learn for later in life.

\*Evolutionarily, sibling rivalry is built into our genes. If you think about it, it was not until recently that we started questioning the ethicality of favoring the firstborn son. The majority of a family's amassed resources would go to the eldest' the one who survived the longest in times when living to adulthood and procreating was uncertain. Extra offspring were often insurance (just in case the older ones died), free labor, or accidents.

\*In the end, most parents crave just one child who can thrive and carry on their legacy, favoring the one who is most likely to fulfill this desire. While this

biological favoritism has become taboo to admit, it inevitably flavors sibling relationships with competitiveness for resources and success.

\*Siblings are more likely to take care of (rather than sabotage) each other when older, and when the difference in age is greater (and they desire different resources). The proportion of care versus fighting is also determined culturally. Cultures that rely more on siblings parenting each other create stronger lifetime sibling bonds characterized by less competition and fighting.

\*Of course, there is no single result of sibling rivalry or parental favoritism. For many siblings, fighting is also accompanied by greater closeness, and favoritism may bring siblings closer against the unfairness of a parent.

\*Siblings can serve therapeutic roles for each other, particularly in helping each other open up & deal with past traumas & poor decisions. Siblings can also serve parenting roles for each other in ways that strengthen or weaken their bonds.

\*While siblings tend to scatter in young adulthood, older adulthood often brings them back together. In old age, we lose companions (spouses, partners, friends) just as we need them more than ever, and siblings often come together to fill the gaps for each other. Living near one another provides not only material support, but also a deep and rewarding emotional companionship fed by a long history of shared experience spanning many years.

**LASTLY, childhood sibling relationships are not necessarily indicative of adult sibling relationships!** Author unknown

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