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Sibling Rivalry

*Understanding and Fostering
Healthy Sibling Relationships*



Brought to You by the
NIH Work/Life Center

Definition

What is sibling rivalry?

Feelings of jealousy, frustration, boredom, competition, or inadequacy leading to bickering and conflict with another sibling.



- It's a familiar scene. You've just come home from work after a long day. You're hungry and tired and it's time to fix dinner, but the kids are at it in the kitchen, fighting over whose turn it is to set the table.

The term sibling refers to children who are related and living in the same family. Sibling rivalry has existed as long as families. Think back to Biblical times and Joseph's problems with his brothers or of the dreadful time Cinderella had with her stepsisters!

- It seems strange that whenever the word sibling comes up, the word rivalry seems sure to follow despite the fact that there are many solid sibling relationships in families (brothers and sisters who like and enjoy one another). However, it is the rivalry that gets attention the proverbial squeaky wheel.

"Quotes from Sibs"

- "Me and my brother love each other's company and I'm friends with his friends and he's friends with my friends but sometimes when we get in a fight, it gets REALLY MESSY! We start punching each other and try to kill each other and everything. Then a couple minutes later, we're playing with each other. Then sometimes the fight starts over again!" --Jesse, 13
- "My 3 sisters and I fight about a lot! I share a room w/ my older sis who is 15. She's real annoying at times but she can be real nice. You just have to get used to being nice to them and they'll be nice to you!" --Alexa, 12

http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/family/sibrivalry/you_said_it.html

"Quotes from Sibs"

- "My sister is 16. She plays harp, sings, and gets pretty good grades. Everybody says she's like, perfect. We fight all the time over stupid stuff like chores so I know she's not. I hate it when I get called, 'Lena's little sister' all the time, and she knows it. Sometimes I think she does it just to bug me!! I still love her." --FISH12, 13
- "Me and my sister always fight about music. She wants to listen to Britney Spears but I want to listen to Smash Mouth. She starts a fight and then I say, 'Okay, we'll listen to Britney but I thought you said you don't like Britney.' Then my mom comes in and lets me come into the living room and use the CD player out there." --Stephen, 11

Advice from Tyler...

- "Ohhh...them again. Well, I'm the oldest of three, and once again let me tell you, it is NO walk in the park. We fight for no good reason. My little sister doesn't do much though, including not picking up her messes. I have to do it because we share a room. She doesn't even sleep in it and she's 7 years old, for crying out loud. To solve the problem, we usually get yelled at. My younger brother is usually the one fighting. He is the most annoying thing in the world, I tell ya!!!! I guess you get used to it. My advice to you is to enjoy it while you can. They're coming, and there's no way out (and if you have a younger brother, just ignore him when he makes noises and talks too much). When he knows no one is paying attention to him, he'll stop. I guarantee he will. That advice is solid gold. It actually works)!"
--Tyler, 11

http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/family/sibrivalry/you_said_it.html

Objectives

- Discuss where sibling rivalry originates
- Decide when to intervene/mediate
- Decide when to turn the other way
- Identify strategies to teach children empathy, communication, and negotiation skills necessary in developing healthy relationships

The Positive Side of Sibling Rivalry

"My sisters and I get along extremely well. We fight sometimes, laugh together and have loads of fun together. I love my sisters with all my heart. Nothing will ever come between us."--Angie, 12

Some Sibling Rivalry is normal. Children are developing coping and social skills.

They are learning to:

- compromise and negotiate
- respect boundaries
- control aggressive impulses
- share
- value another person's perspective



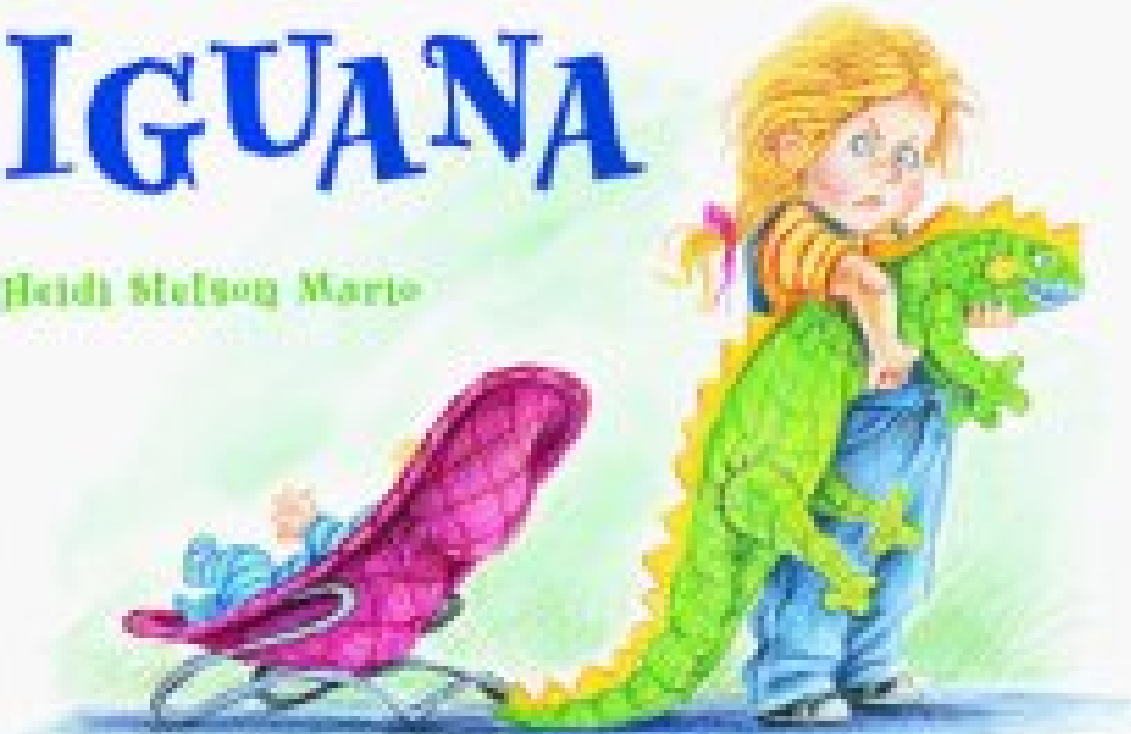
What Influences Sibling Rivalry?

- Position in family, sex, age
- Other individual characteristics, attitudes, and personality traits of the child
- Level of family functioning – family coping skills, modeling by parents, family norms, special circumstances within the family
- Parental attitude
- Media influences



I'd Rather Have an IGUANA

Heidi Stetsog Marie



Parent's Role

- You **HAVE** to intervene if there's a danger of physical harm – *action does speak louder than words*
- You may not react at all. Let the children work it out themselves.
- You **MAY** have to intervene if the situation escalates. Even then, encourage your children to resolve the crisis themselves. Resolve problems **with** your children, not **for** them.

Helping Your Children to Build Healthier Relationships

Model, Teach, and Encourage:

Empathy

Communication Skills

Negotiation Skills



Empathy

- Encourage children to treat others the way they would want to be treated
- Ask children to imagine what someone might be thinking or feeling
- Discuss the benefits of understanding another's situation or point of view
- Encourage the idea of appreciating individual differences



IML JOURNAL PAGE



SIBLING RIVALRY

THE THINGS I LIKE MOST ABOUT MY SIBLING(S) ARE:

THE THINGS I FIND MOST FRUSTRATING ABOUT MY SIBLING(S) ARE:

Journal Page

WHEN A SIBLING TRIES TO GET THE BEST OF ME OR WANTS TO MAKE EVERYTHING A COMPETITION, THIS IS WHAT I FEEL:

I FEEL LIKE MY PARENTS ARE FAIR OR UNFAIR (CIRCLE ONE) BECAUSE:

I USUALLY WANT TO COOPERATE OR COMPETE (CIRCLE ONE) WITH MY BROTHER OR SISTER BECAUSE:

THESE ARE SOME THINGS THAT MAKE ME FEEL JEALOUS ABOUT MY SIBLING(S):

Communication Skills

- If a situation has escalated, separate the children until they are calm and instruct them to return with at least one idea about how their conflict can be resolved
- Teach them the value of listening to the other person; don't interrupt
- Encourage children to use words; help them identify what they are feeling

Offer Suggestions to Your Child for Handling the Situation

- Ignore the teasing
- Kidd back in a way that is funny
- Simply agree (in a kidding way) that whatever the teaser is saying is true
- Tell the teaser that enough is enough
- Use "I" statements
- When these measures aren't working ask the person in charge (parent, baby sitter) for help

Negotiation Skills

- If your children frequently squabble over the same items (such as TV or video games), ask them to decide on a playing schedule
- Discuss compromise – each child can have SOME of what they each want
- Discuss the concept of “win-win”

Promoting Peace and Harmony

- Listen to and value each child - their individual ideas, feelings, and interests
- Spend alone time with each child – reading a book, special events
- Model appropriate problem solving and conflict resolution
- Avoid the “blame game” or playing favorites. It takes two to have conflict - anyone who is involved is partly responsible
- Allow children to have “private” time or “alone” time away from their siblings
- Talk about the special bond and friendship of sister or brotherhood – read stories to communicate the message

Family Systems

- Avoid comparisons that intensify jealousy
- Give attention and materials according to individual need (perceived "fairness")
- Don't take sides in sibling fights
- Develop a "House Rules" pact
- Spell out consequences for behavior
- Use a system for distributing privileges
- Time and persistence – it takes time to learn new ways of treating each other
- Don't give up – it may get worse before it gets better

More Information

- Medline Plus – Search “Sibling”
- Nemours Foundation – *Getting along with brothers and sisters*
- American Academy of Pediatrics - *Rivalry among Stepsiblings*
- Books for Parents (see handout)
- Books for Kids (see handout)