

Sibling Rivalry

According to the University of Michigan here are some potential causes (apart from trying to irritate parents):

- Each child is competing to define who they are as an individual. As they discover who they are, they try to find their own talents, activities, and interests. They want to show that they are separate from their siblings.
- Children feel they are getting unequal amounts of your attention, discipline, and responsiveness (this may be just what they perceive not what is actually occurring).
- Children may feel their relationship with their parents is threatened by the arrival of a new baby.
- Your children's developmental stages will affect how mature they are and how well they can share your attention and get along with one another.
- Children who are hungry, bored or tired are more likely to become frustrated and start fights (don't we all?).
- Children may not know positive ways to get attention from or start playful activities with a brother or sister, so they pick fights instead.
- Children often fight more in families where parents think aggression and fighting between siblings is normal and an acceptable way to resolve conflicts.
- Not having time to share regular, enjoyable family time together (like family meals) can increase the chances of children engaging in conflict (there is actually a Campaign in QLD to encourage families to eat together at the table – a bit like we used to do in the olden days).
- Stress in the parents' lives can decrease the amount of time and attention parents can give the children and increase sibling rivalry (my thoughts on this are that attention should be about quality rather than quantity).
- Stress in your children's lives can shorten their fuses, and decrease their ability to tolerate frustration, leading to more conflict (are they coping at school; is something worrying them?).

- How parents treat their kids and react to conflict can make a big difference in how well siblings get along.

Remember conflict in a family is normal. We sometimes have expectations that our own families will be different and perfect. This is never the case...

- Bear in mind that rivalry comes not from their feelings about each other, but from their need to be loved by their parents.
- Use routines and rules. Avoid situations that breed rivalry.

As hard as it may be try not to be the referee

- stand back and back off and let them work it out. They will begin to develop different problem-solving strategies that will effectively sort most things out between them. Ask them to suggest ways they could resolve the conflict. This way, they may surprise themselves (and you) by solving their own problems.

However, when you do need to get involved:

- Try to be fair and don't get involved in a he-said/she-said recount because you'll never get a true sense of who started the argument
- If your children ask for your help in sorting out a conflict, don't take sides
- Insist that everyone remain calm while resolving the conflict (easier said than done especially when it's me trying to remain calm!).
- Ask them to take turns in speaking to avoid them shouting over each other and the argument once again escalating
- Make sure that they apologise to each other
- Don't get into the blame game - this is always unhelpful and may make one child resentful.
- Encourage positive communication make suggestions

and let kids decide what to do with them. Discourage dobbing. Look for the good by saying things such as 'that's kind of you to let your brother go first' this will help to build their relationship in a positive way.

- Focus on each child's individual needs. Some sibling rivalry may result from your child's perception that you love another child more than him - make sure that you show your love equally and in meaningful ways (even if their behaviour isn't what you hope it might be).

Is there any good news?? Apparently...

According to the raising children network:

- These kinds of disagreement are part of growing up in a family. In fact, they can be a great chance for your children to practise the social skills they'll need as adults. **Fighting will decrease** as your children grow and develop better social skills.
- When disagreements between brothers and sisters get worked out fairly and without anyone getting hurt, children start to build problem-solving skills such as negotiating. They also learn the importance of seeing another person's point of view and respecting other people's rights, feelings and belongings.
- **One of the keys to fewer fights is what you do when kids aren't fighting.** This includes showing them how to use good social and emotional skills such as managing angry feelings, reminding them about the importance of negotiating and helping them learn to play fair. An opportunity to role play good behaviour!

There is more information about what kids fight about at different ages and how their temperament and environment can impact on

their relationship with their sibling. There is also a little video with some mums (including Johanna Griggs) talking about the strategies they use.

<http://raisingChildren.net.au/articles/fighting.htm>

!

Remember – sibling rivalry and conflict happens in all families and it is a normal part of growing up. As always if you have any questions or would like any further information please don't hesitate to contact me.