

# How to Approach Sibling Rivalries

Many parents dream that their children will grow up to be lifelong friends. That happens quite often, but typically not without a few bumps along the way.

Siblings disagree from time to time, and sibling rivalry is a part of growing up and charting one's course in the family unit. However, parents can take steps to avoid sibling rivalries developing between their children.

Children routinely test their boundaries and their places within their families, vying for attention from parents or other caregivers, especially when they become a brother or sister



for the first time. A first-born child who went from being the sole focus of his parents' attention may struggle to adjust when another child is welcomed into the family.

Sibling rivalry also occurs because young children may not be able to fully process their emotions as soundly as adults. Kids may not recognize that a sibling is not a threat; as a result, they may act out reactively instead of thinking and choosing a more productive way of behaving. According to Dr. Gail Gross, a researcher and educator with a Ph.D. in Psychology, competitive or aggressive behavior could set the course for a lifetime of negative patterns, influencing a child's relationships with their siblings or other significant friends or even future romantic interests when they come of age.

Parents can take proactive approaches to prevent sibling rivalries from developing between their children.

#### Encourage friendship before birth.

Older children should become acquainted with the new baby before he or she arrives and be included in

the process of welcoming him or her. Parents also can relive the older child's babyhood, offers childcare expert Dr. Sears. Show older brothers or sisters what they looked like as infants and how life changed for the better. Assign older children key roles in the family, such as a mother or father's assistant. This way, he or she is taking an active part in helping the family run smoothly.

#### Consider spacing children three to four years apart.

By spacing siblings apart by three or four years, parents may find that one child is ready for more independence while the new baby will require more constant care. This also may alleviate some stress in the household because the older child can be an important helper.

#### Make sure kids have their own unique belongings.

Each child can have their own personal toys and possessions that they hold dear. They can choose to share these with one another in play areas, but they should not be forced to compete over particular items.

#### Don't compare children in front of them.

Children may interpret comparison as criticism. Children will not reach milestones at the same time, and parents should not compare their kids' progress, or lack thereof, in front of the youngsters.

#### Let kids work disagreements out.

Children will have arguments, and parents should try not to take sides. Let kids work disagreements out on their own when possible.

Sibling rivalries can develop, but parents can take steps to ensure such rivalries do not affect their kids' long-term relationships with one another.

**For more information, you may contact Katie Stelle-Mardis at Katie's Kids Learning Center, 309-663-5800 or e-mail [katie@katiekids.net](mailto:katie@katiekids.net). They have two locations, 1602 Glenbridge Rd. in Bloomington and 2003 Jacobssen Dr. in Normal.**

Submitted by  
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