

Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

Sibling Rivalry

by Kevin Stuckey, M.Ed., CCC-SLP

Siblings of all ages have experienced some form of sibling rivalry. They may be playing calmly together one minute and then everything breaks into an argument, followed by tears. The question is, why does this happen? And what can we do to limit these situations? Young children do not typically use words to express their emotions in difficult situations. Many exhibit behaviors such as yelling and hitting in an attempt to resolve the situation. As adults, it is our responsibility to be a model of behavior, teach children how to handle their feelings/emotions, and instill strategies to deal with negative situations.

Why Kids Fight

As children grow, they are not only learning how to navigate their own world each day, but also how to interact with others, especially siblings. Children of different ages may have different interests and play interaction expectations. Some children may prefer to always play with others while some children like to play alone. Children also present their own personality such as being calm or short tempered, which can result in conflict among siblings.



One very important thing for adults to keep in mind is the fact that children will often times mimic the adult examples being provided to them whether positive or negative. Therefore, being present with your children and being a positive role model through good times and conflict cannot be emphasized enough.

Tips to Help Children Get Along and Prevent Sibling Rivalry



- **Set ground rules and allow children to work things out themselves —** Make sure children understand what is expected of them and include them to help create the rules as well as appropriate consequences.



- **Treat kids fairly and not equally —** There are instances in which one child may require more of the parent's attention (special medical needs, etc.) or feel one child is being favored more than the other. Be aware and attentive to each child's need for attention and interaction.



- **Give children one-on-one attention —** Make time to focus your time specifically on what the child is interested in without disruptions from other siblings.



- **Identify when kids need time apart —** Stay tuned in to your children's activities. Create situations so that each child is doing a different activity at the same time.



- **Alone time —** Allow children alone time to explore their interests in their own way.

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As adults, we can create an environment that encourages and supports family and sibling interaction while reducing conflict among family members. Demonstrate unconditional love and show your children that they are in a safe, loving environment. Provide the understanding to children that they are important to you and that you will be there for them in all situations.



Things to remember:



- **Create opportunities for cooperative play** — Provide tasks that will be accomplished together while using toys/materials that will need to be shared to complete the activity.



- **Plan fun activities for the family** — Family game nights, special outings, watching movies together, etc. can all be ways to bond as a family.



- **Repeat family rules as needed** — Keep the expectations always present in children's minds.



- **Celebrate individuality** — Highlight each child's interests and success.

Related Handy Handouts®:

[477 – What About Me? Helping Siblings Understand Autism](#)

[124 – Active Parenting Promotes Successful Child Development](#)

[390 – Helping Children Understand and Deal with Emotions](#)

Resources:

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/sibling-rivalry-tips-5-for-prevention-5-for-intervention/>

<https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/sibling-rivalry>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/sibling-rivalry.html>

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