

“Give it back!”
“Stop that!”
“He won’t share!”
“I had it first!”
“She kicked me!”
“That’s not fair!”



Sound familiar? Oh, when your kids just can’t seem to get along... GRRRRRR!

I vividly remember fighting with my older sister over who got to sit in the front seat of the car, who got the last pudding cup and what show we were going to watch on TV. She always felt it was her job to tell me what to do, what to say and, especially, how to act. So I made it my mission in life to find every way possible to embarrass her in front of everyone! The only thing we shared was genetics. I’m pretty sure she hated me most of the time we were growing up... and I didn’t care much for her either.

Fast-forward 45 years, and hate is the last thing that would be part of our relationship. My big sister is the only person on the planet who grew up in the same world as I did. Although we are polar opposites in many ways, the bond that we share is immeasurable. Friends have come and gone throughout our lives, but my sister has been my lifelong constant, offering unconditional support, understanding and acceptance. I know that she is forever in my corner, and I am in hers.

Sibling rivalry is frustrating and upsetting, and it can create a household full of conflict that is very stressful for everyone. Siblings fight for various reasons, including ever-changing personal needs, differences in temperament, stubbornness and selfishness, and having poor conflict resolution skills.

On the flip side, however, sibling rivalry does offer kids problem-solving practice for life. Thanks to the challenges my big sister presented as we grew up, I consider myself an expert in this area!

Here are a few tips that might be helpful the next time a sibling war breaks out at your house:

- Make each child feel uniquely appreciated and validated. People have three basic emotional needs: SEE ME, HEAR ME and VALIDATE ME. When children feel that one or more of these needs is not being met, they will do whatever it takes to fulfill them. [Giving them praise](#) is a great way to show this appreciation.

- Explain to your children that **FAIR DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN EQUAL**. Your children are not the same and their needs are ever-changing. Often, a parent will need to spend more time with one child than with another. The privileges you give your children also might be different and ever-changing, depending on circumstances. Remember, situations are unique to each child, and each child will have a different definition of “quality time.”
- **PROMOTE SENSITIVITY and EMPATHY**. Trying to understand each sibling’s perspective or what he or she is going through often can help reduce the occurrence and severity of sibling rivalry.
- **DON'T ALWAYS TRY TO BE the JUDGE or JURY**. Whenever possible, let your children work out their own differences. If you always step in, you risk creating other problems. Your children might start expecting you to rescue them all the time, rather than just letting them learn how to work out problems on their own. Your children also may perceive you as being one child’s “protector,” which can lead to sibling resentment. The “protected” child also might start thinking he or she can get away with more because you are always saving him or her. There is one caveat to this suggestion: **NEVER HESITATE TO STEP IN IF THERE IS DANGER OF PHYSICAL HARM**.
- Remember... all successful human relationships must have two things: **TRUST and COMMUNICATION**. If one or both are missing, the relationship will fail. Build trust and communication between all family members by holding regular family meetings, fostering a team spirit, using humor to create a positive mood and defuse conflicts, and avoiding making comparisons between your children.

Today my sister and I have much more in common than just genetics. We may share differing views of life’s memories, but the bond that has grown between us will never be broken.

It’s never too early (or too late) to start teaching your children how to build that bond.

“Siblings are a priceless gift, but you must endure time to open it up.”

Get Julia Cook’s new book on sibling rivalry [‘I Want to Be the Only Dog’](#) available from the Boys Town Press.

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