



How parents can support **SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS**

Sibling conflict and rivalry is a normal part of development, but it generates conflict that can be tough for parents to manage. How can parents respond? What are some tips on how the bond between brothers and sisters can be strengthened?

SOME CONFLICT IS NORMAL. COMMON SOURCES OF SIBLING CONFLICTS:

Be aware of the issues most likely to cause conflict in your family. These might include:

- Birth order, age spacing and gender of each child
- Child temperaments, self esteem levels, health issues, behaviors (introverts/extroverts)
- Parenting behaviors, unique parent-child relationships
- Competition, jealousy
- Blended families, schedules

TRY THESE TIPS TO MANAGE/LIMIT SIBLING RIVALRY:

- Encourage each child's unique talents and celebrate differences; NEVER compare your children or show favoritism
- Prioritize time alone with each child on a regular basis
- Establish limits for conflict between siblings and be clear that violence is unacceptable (*For example, "You hit, you sit"*)
- Give siblings special chores or projects to complete together; encourage them to help and support one another

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY TO BE A ROLE MODEL FOR THEIR RELATIONSHIPS:

The sibling relationship is a critical first step as a child establishes conflict resolution skills and experiments with managing a relationship:

- Resolve conflict with your spouse or partner in healthy ways to show how/that it can be done
- Show how to validate feelings and calmly express your own
- A strong sibling relationship can be a source of self esteem, as well as a "buffer" when faced with conflicts in other relationships



Are you tired of the fighting in your home? It's not always easy to stay calm.

Keep in mind that sibling fighting can be a reflection of the strength of their relationship – a deep love and passionate connection between siblings – not simply a reflection of negative feelings. **Establish boundaries that call for respect, non-violence and empathy.** Set ground rules for how your family members speak and listen to one another, and be sure you are getting alone time with each child so he or she can share thoughts, questions and fears with you as well.



How should a parent resolve conflict between siblings?

The goal should be to COACH children, not involve yourself in the conflict. For older children, it's important to **give space and opportunities** to resolve a conflict while you simply observe. At younger ages (10 and under) children still need to be taught the skills for resolving conflict, rather than just having a parent intervene and "fix" the problem. Children need to try -- and sometimes fail -- at resolving issues themselves so they can eventually do it on their own.

With young children you might intervene more, but it's not to "take sides" or judge the situation. It's an opportunity to **model empathy, respect and communication skills** that will help them as they grow.

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