

Sibling Rivalry

Differences between children are often at the core of sibling rivalry. If you are a parent of more than one child, you know all too well the symptoms of sibling rivalry: constant criticisms, bickering between children, tattling, one child trying to be the best, or one child being everything the other child is not. Though a certain amount of rivalry is natural and healthy for kids, too much can become intolerable for parents. It can be useful to look at some practices that promote sibling rivalry and others that reduce it.

Classic Rivalry Raisers

- Expecting or insisting that all children be the same
- Praising one child, but criticizing another
- Comparing one child to another
- Solving each and every dispute they have with each other
- Being harder on one child when s/he misbehaves (usually happens with the eldest child)
- Modeling competitive behaviors
- Comparing school results and other achievements of each child



Simple Rivalry Reducers

- **Accepting children's individual differences.** This is crucial for reducing sibling rivalry. The level of acceptance of differences can determine the degree of competitiveness between kids.
- **Recognizing their roles in the family.** Children will adopt different roles in the family. One may be the peacemaker, another the helper, another the comedian. While encouraging each child to make a positive contribution to the family, accept their own individual ways of being family members.
- **Focusing more on the deed, and less on the dude.** Focus your positive comments about your child's good behavior on the process rather than the results; the act more than the actor. For example, saying "*It was nice that you shared your toys with your sister,*" focuses on the kind act of sharing.
- **Focusing on the solutions more than the fight.** When children fight and argue, give ideas and strategies to resolve their problem rather than sorting out the fight. Give them time to cool off and think before intervening.
- **Holding family meetings starting at age five years.** Through regular family meetings, you can teach children how to resolve conflicts plus give kids an opportunity to have an impact on family decisions. Family meetings are an effective tool in reducing rivalry and ensuring harmonious relationships between family members.
- **The family that plays together, stays together.** Have enjoyable family activities, such as games and family rituals, like sharing mealtimes. These rituals help children feel that they belong to something solid - a family.
- **Modeling the behaviors and values you want your children to develop.** You are your children's first and most important teacher! They will look up to you and follow your example.

This tip sheet was adapted, with permission, from the article "Seven Ways to Promote Sibling Rivalry" by Michael Grose. Visit www.parentingideas.com.au for more great ideas to help you raise happy, confident kids and resilient young people. Or, subscribe to Happy Kids by sending a blank e-mail to: parents-subscribe@topica.com.