

# SIBLING RIVALRY

BY CELESTE STRYDOM

**Y**ou're riding in the back of your family's car. Granny's hitched a ride and taken a coveted window seat. Your nine-year-old sibling has called dibs on the other. What ensues is 7 minutes of misery. A knee brushing against yours is a war offensive. "She's touching me!!!" Dad, give credit where it's due; he simultaneously manoeuvres his vehicle through suburbia and swats between the gap in the front seats. This car, albeit a station wagon, isn't big enough for both of you.

If you grew up with a sibling this might sound familiar. Now that you're raising your own family, you understand the concern of dealing with children in conflict.

**HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILDREN IN DROPPING THEIR WEAPONS AND BECOMING FRIENDS.**

**WHAT IS SIBLING RIVALRY?**

Sibling rivalry is the conflict that arises between children raised in the same family. When parents are planning their families it's with visions of warm dinners around the table. They want their children to have a sibling and a friend, but you might instead see your off-spring engaging in:

- Name-calling
- Verbal or physical fighting
- Competition for your attention
- Telling on each other
- Breaking or hiding one another's possessions

This bond often outlasts any other family tie, but differences can be a source of lasting bitterness.

**CAUSES**

There are many reasons that siblings might quarrel. Having a housemate who is either very different or very similar to oneself can be challenging. Family members also make

comparisons between their children and their needs. Personalities of their offspring develop differently which also can lead to conflict.

There's a misconception that specific age gaps make children more

prone to rivalry. There is also no particular age when it magically disappears. Every family has unique personalities. Some siblings who are close in age are best friends while others are enemies. Children need support because, left unattended, resentments can carry through to adulthood.

**HERE ARE A FEW OTHER FACTORS:**

- **Personalities and temperaments.** Your children's adaptability can influence how they get along. An A-type personality raised alongside a very laid-back sibling might easily ruffle one another's feathers.
- **Your parenting style.** Kids strive for equality. Often at the root of sibling rivalry are children who feel that they aren't getting equal amounts of attention, are on the receiving end of more severe discipline, and are getting a different degree of responsiveness.
- **Parental conflict-resolution skills.** Research suggests that there is a strong connection between jealousy among siblings and parents with marital discord and how they interact with their children will determine how sibling rivalry is maintained and/or dismantled.

**HOW TO ADDRESS SIBLING RIVALRY**

On the one hand, you want your children to learn how to deal with conflict resolution and on the other, you want to be sure you support them to foster a friendship. Ingrid Pollak, registered social worker (BSW) in private practice, cautions parents to monitor conflict and to step in immediately when they observe confrontations that edge towards physical or verbal aggression, displays of envy and signs of mean-spirited bickering. It's important to lean on your understanding of your kids' triggers. Try to de-escalate things before they get heated or step in without choosing sides and find consequences that are applied to all equally when you can tell they cannot find a resolution.





Ingrid recommends that parents get familiar with playing mediator: "Mediation allows each child to voice his/her frustration calmly and without name calling. If the other child interferes, teach him/her to take a deep breath, listen, and respond calmly. Parents should show impartiality. Once all points have been raised, the parent should ask if each child feels heard and understood. Suppose parents are concerned that their children's rivalry is growing beyond a conflict they cannot manage. In that case, it is worth consulting with a social worker, school counsellor or psychologist to assist."

It's important that families identify their core values and consistently work at upholding these to raise secure and confident children. It might benefit your household to:

- Create one on one time for each child
- Prioritise family time
- Focus on healthy conflict resolution

#### MORAL OF THE STORY

Within the protective confines of a home, siblings can learn how to handle aggression and keep anger within limits. They also learn how to defend themselves and prepare for future confrontations with strangers. Sibling rivalry isn't all bad. 🍷

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