

Siblings & Peer Relations

By: Rosa M. Henshaw, M.A.

One of our neighbors and I were talking about the frustrations a parent goes through when trying to teach a child how to get along with their siblings. My 2-year-old just adores her older brother, who is 5. What ever he is doing, she needs to do it, or at least wants to participate in some manner. My 5-year-old is gentle with her, will teach her things, but is short with his patience. Sometimes, I feel like a referee! The Christian Home & School Journal has an article about sibling rivalry, and states that 80% of our population grows up with at least one brother or sister. Some family therapists say that your sibling(s) are the first peers that you live with on an intimate basis. Others say your sibling relationship is like your first marriage. Is a sibling relationship that important?

We do know that the lessons learned within the sibling relationship can set a pattern for how we relate to others outside the family unit. It is both the family and community where we learn our values, religious and ethical beliefs, patterns of problem solving, behavioral responses, and attitudes. Correlations have been found in recent studies between positive social behaviors and sibling friendships. S.Graham-Bermann and S.Gest (1991) developed a study that observed the quality of sibling relationships. Their findings showed that siblings with a relationship have a better chance of forming lasting friendships with each other and with outside peers.

Sibling relationships do change as children grow up, and the patterns of individual differences start to become more noticeable during mid-childhood and adolescence. As adolescents, siblings are focused more on their individuality than their equality, just as they were when they were younger. It's important to instill a supportive relationship among siblings as young as possible, and to encourage them to display their own individuality not only among siblings, but also peers.

Every sibling, brothers or sisters, will inescapably have differences in attitudes, values, beliefs, tastes, and/or opinions. Here are some techniques to help our children learn better ways to get along with each other.

The goal.

Remember that the goal in managing sibling rivalry effectively is to show them how to get along. Demonstrate how you get along with your spouse or friends. Children have to learn how to have relationships; they are not born with it. As a parent, help your children learn how to behave and respond in society, learn how to problem solve in social interactions, and have positive attitudes about relationships and friendships. In the journal *The Christian Home & School Journal*, A child psychologist, Wade F. Horn, said that a brother or sister could provide us with

encouragement, support, friendship, and camaraderie all throughout our lives. "Indeed," He said, "Adult happiness is largely dependant upon a supportive network of extended family or friends; the seeds of witch are sown in the day-by-day interactions with siblings during childhood".

Teach Kids How to Solve Their Problems.

Children need to know what they have control over and what they don't. For children to know how to solve a problem and know how to get along with each other, they must be taught. Although a child may be "good natured", their actions are still based on selfish motives. They need boundaries and limits regarding which reactions are appropriate and which ones are not. This will give them security. The 5-year-old is being pushed and poked by his 2-year-old sister. The 5-year-old needs to learn to say "Stop pushing me!" and if the little one persists, the 5-year-old has to continue problem solving in his head and say, "I have asked you to stop pushing me, but you still are pushing me. What is it that you need?" and try to understand his sibling. This will help the older child to start developing patience and the young one starts learning to turn-take and talk. Maybe his sister dropped her wooden horse under the table where he was standing. It is important to start encouraging your children to begin to communicate in order to start the problem-solving process. This can decrease the parent's involvement as a referee! Do praise your children when they solve a problem. They need to know that the behavior and actions were appropriate.

Do Not Take Sides.

As a parent, I know how frustrating it can be trying to figure out which child started what, and who's fault it was. Of course, if the communication becomes an argument, and then into harsh language or pushing/shoving, you need to step in. Some counselors suggest monitoring sibling relationships in order to intervene. If you notice there is no loyalty, no good times together, no interest of camaraderie, then you should be looking at the type of relationship they have.

Talk About It.

Talk about feelings (happy, sad, anger, frustrated, or scared) with our children is an important key factor to help them understand themselves and others. At 2 years of age, temper tantrums are part of the emotional curriculum, learning to communicate anger or frustration. They don't understand what they are feeling inside, but they do feel like kicking and screaming. A parent has to help teach the child how to channel these feelings by showing them what they are, what do they mean, what to do with them and how to communicate them.

Remember Kids Individuality.

Respect their differences and teach them to do the same. Parenting might be easier if one could put the children in the same sport or after school activities. In reality, the children are much happier if they are busy with what they are interested in, and might even enjoy watching their sibling play their sport and cheering them on! Also, teach your children how to respect their sibling's special toys or the projects that they are working on. My 2-year-old sometimes has problems understanding that she cannot grab and play with all of her older brother's special toys. That rule also goes for the 5-year-old and his little sister's special toys. This is what we call mutual respect of individuality.

Managing Competition.

Psychologists are saying that many parents compare their children to motivate them, but they say these tactics usually fail, might create resentment, and create more rivalry between kids. "Greg always picks up his room. Why can't you do the same?" "Wendy always does her chores every Saturday morning. What's your problem?" These comparisons are not healthy for the siblings. This could provide an environment for the children to compete against each other. We need to channel the competition with other peers or activities, such as sports or academia. Show them a board game so they can compete against each other in a healthier manner. Many play together as a team against other peers.

Consistence & Enjoyment.

This is even hard for me. The Parenting technique here is to laugh a little more and smile. Understand children are not adults, and in reality the silly behaviors are just that, childish behaviors. The other thing to do as a parent is to be consistent. Sit with your young children and show them how to share, resolve disputes, and communicate better. The more consistent we are, the more empowerment we give our children to have better relations with their sibling(s) and peers. This will help us enjoy our children to the fullest, and hopefully, be a positive influence in their lives.

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