

SIBLING RIVALRY

Sibling rivalry is the competition between brothers and sisters for their parents' attention. All children need love and attention from their parents, and parents need to reassure their children that they love each of them. Sometimes children worry when they have to share their parents' attention. So it's very normal and natural for children to feel jealous at times.

Sibling rivalry is more common with brothers and sisters of the same sex. It occurs among children of all ages, but is more intense between 2 and 4 years of age. When children in the family are close in age, sibling rivalry is more likely to occur.

If one child in the family has a long-term illness or special needs, this can also lead to sibling rivalry. Other children in the family may feel left out. When the ill child needs special attention, brothers and sisters may feel less important.

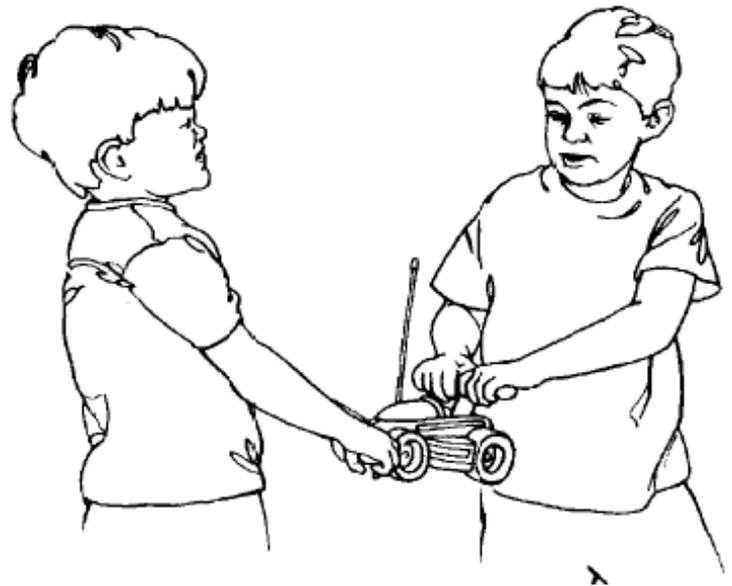
SIGNS OF SIBLING RIVALRY

Children under 9 years of age may show these signs:

- Fighting (verbal or physical attacks)
- Frustration
- Demanding attention
- "Tattling"
- Regressive acts such as bed-wetting, baby talk, thumbsucking, temper tantrums.

Older children may show these signs:

- Constant arguing
- Competing for friends, grades, or in sports
- Taking out their frustration on objects, pets, or other people.



Picture 1 Sibling rivalry is common among children who are close in age

REACTIONS TO A NEW BABY

- A common cause of sibling rivalry is a new baby in the family. Other children may show these signs:
- Showing anger toward the baby (hitting, kicking, punching, biting)
- Asking for the baby to go back in mother's tummy or back to the hospital.
- Demanding more attention when the parent is with the baby.

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD ADJUST TO A NEW BABY

- Remind each child often that he or she is loved. Let your children know you respect *all* their feelings - even the angry thoughts.
- Involve your children in getting ready for the new baby to come home.
- Tell older children early about your pregnancy to give them more time to prepare.
- If an older child has to move to a new room, make the move early.
- Let the older child "help" with baby's care, and be sure to give lots of praise. But never leave the baby alone with a toddler.
- If possible, space your children 2 to 3 years apart.
- If children continue to have problems adjusting, think about getting professional counseling.

HOW TO MANAGE SIBLING RIVALRY

Sibling rivalry is not all bad. In fact, it can be helpful because it can teach children how to solve problems. Parents should not get too involved in their children's arguments. Parents can't force children to get along, but they *can* teach them problem-solving skills and cooperation.

Here are some ways to manage sibling rivalry:

- Be a role model to teach your child positive problem-solving skills.
- Don't criticize if your child starts acting like a baby again. This will pass as he gets older and begins to accept the new baby.
- Praise your children to build their self-confidence.
- Listen to your children's needs.
- Spend time with your children to reassure them that they are loved.
- Avoid situations that may lead to jealousy.
- Don't "play favorites" - be fair and consistent.
- When there's a new baby in the home, don't expect your older child to learn new skills, such as toilet training.
- If the arguing or "acting out" gets to be too much, give yourself a "time out" and get away from the situation.



Picture 2 Let the older child "help" with baby's care.

FOR MORE HELP

If signs of sibling rivalry last more than 6 months, you may want to seek help. You may contact:

- Children's Hospital Guidance Centers. Call (614) 355-8080. Individual and family counseling is provided for children and their families.
- Parent Connection Line. Call (614) 224-CARE (2773). This is a 24-hour parent information and support line.

For more information on healthy parenting, you may also contact:

- Children's Hospital Community Education at (614) 722-4949. Active Parenting classes are offered throughout the year.
- Your child's doctor
- A local mental health center
- A leader at your place of worship
- Your local library
- Your child's school or day care center.