

SIBLING RIVALRY

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Sibling rivalry occurs in families when one child wants what the other has or when one child is not getting equal attention to another. It often begins when a 2nd child first comes into the home. Child 1 has had all the attention and now another little person is getting most of it. A small child does not understand family dynamics and can only show disapproval by acting out in some way. This may be demonstrated directly or indirectly. Child 1 may start creating negative attention by throwing things, crying, having tantrums or squeezing in between you and your new baby. They might start wetting the bed, or regressing into baby behaviors.

Here are some ways of lessening the likelihood of sibling rivalry in pre-school children. Anticipate that child 1 may feel left out when the new baby comes into the home. Talk to child 1 about what you will be doing for the new baby and that you would like their help. Give them responsibilities to help you. Child 1 can learn to make his own bed, put dishes in the washer, fold the baby clothes, and hold the new baby. They can be made to feel very grown up and special when performing these helping tasks for you. Child 1 is getting praise and attention from you even though you still have to see to the needs of the new baby. While you are feeding the new baby, give child 1 some absorbing activity to do so they are not waiting around for your attention.

There are a number of reasons why rivalry occurs with older siblings. Here are some of them – parents compare one child's ability with another and talk about it in front of the other child; parents favor one child over another; expectations force a child into some activity or sport they are not good at and, when they can't master it, they are left feeling not good enough; a middle child is sometimes 'lost' in the mix, feels left out, and this may lead to jealousy.

Here are some suggestions for preventing sibling rivalry in the long term: Have a clear set of family values in place to ensure equal love and attention for one another. Celebrate and encourage the differences in your children's skills, abilities and personalities. Accept that kids of any age have strong feelings and that they need an opportunity to express feelings of hurt and unhappiness. Take each child out separately for some good quality time with parent/s. Be aware of the 'middle child syndrome' and make sure they don't feel left out. If not discouraged and dealt with, sibling rivalry can continue throughout life.

Here are some suggestions of what to do when sibling rivalry already exists: Take each child separately, and encourage them to talk about negative feelings they have for their siblings. You may be surprised at what they tell you. Then get the two siblings together, and with you present, have them tell

one another how they feel. Go back to the family values you created together and discuss the value of respecting one another and what that will look like.

Discuss how these feelings of rivalry can be prevented in future. Open dialogue and honest expression of how we feel, is the quickest way to resolve conflicts.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.