



## Building Strong Sibling Relationships

Fighting between siblings is totally normal and healthy when there is also a lot of time spent enjoying each other.

### Suggestions for supporting positive sibling relationships:

- **Encourage siblings to share their abilities and excitements with one another.** For example, when your older child builds something with blocks and is excited about it, you might say, “Oh I bet name of sibling is going to love to hear all about the cool building you made.”
- **Give both siblings a chance to take care of one another.** For example, have a sibling peel a banana or tell a story from a book by looking at the pictures.
- **Offer praise about situations to point out the bond you notice between them.** Let them know how happy it makes you to see that they like doing things for one another. Make comments like, “What fun for you two that you’re able to play together now.”
- **Talk about your children as friends and not always as siblings.** For example, instead of saying, “You opened the bottle for him because you are a good big brother and take care of him,” you could say, “You are such a nice friend to him. He really likes being your friend.”
- **Allow siblings to play together.** This time will allow them to figure out how to play together, respond to one another, get along, etc.
- **When you’re alone with one of your children, talk about their sibling in positive ways.** Guess what they might be doing. Imagine that he or she is probably missing their sibling, etc.
- **When one child is away, create a surprise that the sibling can have for when they return.** Brainstorm together (if possible) something one sibling could make for the other (create, draw, etc.).
- **Set siblings up for success together.** Figure out ways to encourage positive shared times, rituals, memories, traditions, moments together.
- **Teach your children how to respond calmly and respectfully to each other.** Teach your children ways to calm down, before reacting (for example, “self talk”, counting their fingers). Help your children come up with ideas.
- **Encourage perspective taking.** Practice using “Stop, look, think and talk.”
- **Start family share time.** Make a family game of sharing positive things about other family members. Encourage everyone to be specific about the things they like.

- **Family game time.** Board games, card games, etc., are a great way to share fun time together and allow for conversation.
- **Understand sibling temperament.** Try to be sensitive to your children's individual temperaments and different reactions to certain situations. Each child has their own strengths and challenges. Even between sibling.
- **Work together.** When parents, other family members, and caregiver are understanding and work together, they model cooperation and healthy problem solving.

### Suggestions for reducing sibling conflict:

- **Try not to be the judge.** Figuring out who is right or wrong is almost impossible. It encourages sneaky behavior and lying and is usually unfair. The longer you can stay out of the situation, the sooner your children will learn to settle their differences themselves.
- **Help your children learn to problem solve their own solutions.** Encourage your children to think of solutions on their own (or with your help in practice scenarios) and to not depend on your intervention.
- **Don't make comparisons.** Comparisons between your children lead to jealousy and conflict. Instead, give each child individual goals and expectations.
- **Develop a system to give everyone a turn when possible.** For example, set up a rotation system of privileges with each child getting a turn (for example, to choose the book at night or what you serve for breakfast).
- **Treat your children individually (not always equally).** Making sure things are equal does not always work. Instead, point out special qualities and needs that make your children unique.
- **Step in only if the fight seems excessive, happens again and again or becomes dangerous.** Use the opportunity to teach your children some basic conflict resolution/problem solving skills (for example, using a timer to take turns).
- **Catch the siblings "being good."** Look for any positive interactions between your children and praise them with your attention and enthusiasm (even small ones like cooperation).
- **Don't force apologies.** Apologies are meaningless if they are forced.