

## Sibling Rivalry

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If you have more than one child, chances are pretty good that you have witnessed sibling rivalry at some point or another. Sibling rivalry is often defined as jealousy, competition and arguing between siblings. Kids may compete for attention, recognition, individuality, toys or power in the family – anything that is perceived by the children to be in demand. And, because every child, every family, and every parent is different, there is no universal solution to stop the fighting. But, there are lots of different tips you can try – see what works for you!

So why do children fight? Each child has his or her own personality and temperament: some are easygoing, some are active, some are quiet, and some need extra hugs and cuddles. One child's needs or inclinations might create jealousy in another child. For example, a more outgoing child might be quicker to ask for what he or she needs, leaving the other child feeling like "he gets everything he wants!" Your temperament and personality as a parent also factor in. If you and your partner are very involved in sports, it makes sense that you feel like you have more in common with your athletic, active child, than your little bookworm. Do your very best to show interest in your child's activities, even if they aren't exactly your cup of tea. If your children each feel appreciated as individuals, it will decrease sibling rivalry, and increase your child's confidence and self-esteem.

Creating a respectful and loving environment is an important step in preventing angry arguments. Understanding why children argue and helping them feel heard are also key parts of reducing the fighting. Conflict is a part of family life, and learning to solve problems and manage difficult feelings are life skills that will benefit for your child in the long term. What other steps can you take to stop the problem before it starts?

- If your children are at different developmental stages, they will have different needs and wants. This can be very frustrating to a teen who has a little brother emulating him, or to an active preschooler who doesn't understand why the new baby isn't ready to play yet. Talk to your child about how his or her siblings might be feeling, using words and explanations that fit for their developmental levels.
- Get to know your children as individuals. Try to spend one on one time with each of them, and accept and celebrate the people they are.
- Listen to your children's concerns. If children feel heard and appreciated, they are less likely to compete. Validate your child's feelings, and for younger children, help them find words for their feelings. For example, you might say: "It looks like you feel disappointed when Katie doesn't want to play with you."
- Praise positive behaviour and cooperation. Whether a verbal reinforcement or a simply warm look and a smile, positive reinforcement will help cultivate the behaviour you want to see.

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- Pay attention to how you handle conflict in your own relationships. If you tend to resolve conflicts by yelling or name calling, your children will almost certainly do the same. If you are struggling in your own relationships, or feel depressed or isolated, consider getting help. If you are exhausted and stressed, you will also have a shorter fuse at home. Make an effort to take good care of your physical and emotional self.
- Avoid comparing your children to each other. As much as possible, avoid labelling your children as 'the athletic one' or 'the easy-going one'. Even if there is some truth to the label, it can frustrate your child. It can be helpful for your child to try out different activities, and to explore different parts of his or her personality.

So, after building a strong foundation, how can you manage conflict when it arises?

- As much as possible, let your children work out their conflicts themselves. This might require some coaching from you, but it will be a great problem solving opportunity for them. Be aware, however, that the older child may have a power advantage, and you might need to assist the younger child. You may want to sit down and observe them working it out.
- Set ground rules – you may even consider posting them somewhere in the house. Ground rules may include no hitting, guidelines for time on media or electronics, or no name calling.
- If a particular toy is causing problems, you might consider purchasing a second one, or consider telling your children that if the squabbling continues, that the toy will be taken away.
- School age children and teens may respond well to a family meeting. This allows them to voice their opinions, offer suggestions and feedback, and problem solve collaboratively. Set ground rules, such as each person having a turn talking, no interrupting, and that everyone's opinion is valid.

There are some situations where sibling rivalry can be more complex. If one of your children is chronically ill or has a disability, it's likely that child gets special attention or extra time at least some of the time. Sibling relationships when one child has a disability or illness can be involve conflicting feelings of jealousy, love, guilt, or responsibility, which can be confusing for children to make sense of. Connecting with other parents and families in similar situations can be helpful. Make an effort, as much as possible, to allow your children to express their feelings to you.

Parents of twins, triplets and other multiples often notice that many things are intensified in their families – including sibling rivalry. Many multiples are very close, but they

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sometimes can be very competitive for their parent's time or attention. Some parents of multiples have noticed their children 'one-upping' each other for both positive and negative attention. To encourage your children's sense of individuality, allow them to participate in separate activities based on their individual preferences, and encourage them to develop their own friendships. Many school divisions now have policies to place twins in separate classrooms to help them further develop their own friends and interests. Call them by name, and avoid referring to them as 'the twins' or 'the triplets'. If you haven't already checked out [Manitoba Families of Multiples website](#), consider connecting with them to meet other families and share tips.

Remember, if sibling rivalry feels like it is getting out of control, if anyone is being injured, feels bullied, or if the fighting is impacting your marital relationship, consider getting professional help.

If you would like more information about sibling rivalry or other common parenting concerns, Manitoba's Triple P Parent Line offers parents and caregivers confidential, one on one support over the telephone. In Winnipeg you can call 204-945-4777 or outside Winnipeg, you can call toll-free 1-877-945-4777. You can also [check out their website](#) for more information.

Here are some other great links with more information about sibling rivalry.

[Manitoba Health – Jealousy and Sibling Rivalry](#) – Are you expecting a baby, or do you have a new baby in your family? Jealousy and sibling rivalry can start as soon as a new baby arrives, maybe even sooner. This information from Manitoba Health offers tips to help you ease the transition into siblinghood for your child.

[Sibling Rivalry](#) – Great information on sibling rivalry, including tips for parents, from KidsHealth.

[Sibling Rivalry](#) – Information from the University of Michigan Health System.