

Sibling Rivalry



Learn How to Effectively Respond to Each of Your Children's Needs

Sibling Rivalry is a common concern in many families. Parents often have ideals of their children being each other's best friend and often worry when things don't measure up. Using the principles of Smart Love, parents can help their children choose constructive pleasure over conflict and significantly improve their relationships with each other and with their parents.

The root of sibling rivalry is scarce parental attention in the moment. When sibling rivalry erupts it can often be when the parents are trying to make dinner, talk on the phone or some other task around the house. Normal sibling conflict may occur more often when your children are tired, hungry, sick or bored. They might be too immature or at their wits end to play nicely with one another. With young children who require more constant one-to-one adult attention, bickering occurs when they are left alone too long. Anticipating these moments and looking for these signs will go a long way

in preventing conflict before it occurs. Try to notice when these blow-ups usually happen and try to reorganize your day so that you can be more available to respond to your children's needs.

Sometimes, families fall into a pattern of negative and hurtful experiences, such as yelling, giving timeouts, withdrawing privileges and the like. This creates a dysfunctional model of how to relate to one another that children will copy. They will learn to treat themselves and others harshly. By using "Loving Regulation," Smart Love's approach to managing behavior, parents can help their children seek out and ultimately prefer constructive pleasure. We have found that children respond very well to each other when the adults in their lives are able to provide the nurture they need in a kind and compassionate way.

When a new baby arrives, siblings regress, even before the new baby is born and comes home! Preparing for the new baby by readying the baby's room, shopping together, thinking of names together, looking at ultrasound pictures and even going on hospital new sibling tours can help your older child prepare for the new baby. Careful planning and preparation will help your child begin to understand the concept of a new addition to the family. However, once you bring your new baby home, your older child will still be in shock at all the time and attention a new baby is getting and receiving from his parents that before was there exclusively for him. It is important not to come down hard on your child for this normal reaction and try to be creative in being able to give him the attention and nurturing he needs and desires. Telling

older siblings how important they are to you and how much you love them will reassure them of their place in your home and your heart. Remember that each positive experience with your children builds their good feelings about themselves and will go a long way in building a harmonious family life!

Sibling Rivalry: Smart and Loving Solutions

- Focused, individual playtime with each of your children will fill them up and avoid siblings competing against each other for their parents' attention.
- Plan for cooperative activities. Limiting the length of unsupervised sibling playtime reduces boredom and sibling conflict.
- Illness, hunger and tiredness can often trigger sibling rivalry. Do your best to be available as much as possible to your children during these times.
- It's normal for older siblings to regress when new siblings join the family.
- Avoid criticizing or being angry with your child for the way in which he is trying to cope.
- While adjusting, reassure your older child of their place in your heart. This will demonstrate that there is enough love to go around for everyone.

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for three to six year olds, and parent and child programs for children six weeks to 36 months. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism[®]. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapsychic Humanism Society), parent training and support programs, and publications. © 2019 Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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