

Managing sibling rivalry



Through fighting and arguing, children learn to stand up for what they think is right, defend themselves and express their feelings. Teasing can also be a way that children show their affection towards one another and have fun together.

Senior Occupational Therapists **Chiang Jing Jing** and **Hepsi Priyadharsini**, Child Development Unit, National University Hospital share strategies to help parents manage sibling rivalry positively.



Understand why they are fighting

Finding out the cause of the fight helps you resolve the conflict better.

Siblings can fight over a parent's time and attention, perceived favouritism or imitate how parents deal with conflicts.

Ignore minor quarrels

As long as your children are not hurting one another physically or behaving destructively, allow them to resolve the conflicts on their own.

This teaches them to stand up for themselves without depending on adults.

Teach social skills

Teach your children how to play well and resolve conflicts together when they are not fighting.

Read social stories or give them a problem (e.g. two children wanting the same toy) and help them come up with solutions like taking turns.

Teach boundaries

Encourage your children to respect each other's belongings and to ask for permission before using them.

Allow your children to have some separate time from one another.



Praise the positive behaviour

When you see good social behaviours such as taking turns, sharing and cooperating, praise them immediately to reinforce positive behaviour.

This reduces the need for attention through negative behaviours.

Encourage praise among siblings

Create a positive atmosphere by encouraging your child to tell you when his or her sibling does something positive.

You can set up a reward chart or a jar for your children for them to reward each other.



Use consequences

Discipline both children as they need to learn that they are equally responsible for starting a fight.

You may use timeout or remove the source of conflict (e.g. confiscating a toy or switching off the TV).



Treat each child uniquely

Focus on each child's strengths. This helps them feel special and decreases jealousy and competitiveness between them.

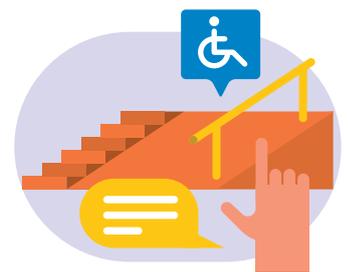
Avoid comparing your children and try to spend some uninterrupted time alone with each child.



Share responsibilities equally

Do not be overly protective of the younger child and give too much responsibility to the older sibling.

Try to avoid gender-specific treatment (e.g. girls must help in the kitchen and boys can play) as it can cause resentment.



Supporting siblings of children with special needs

Talk openly to them about the issues that their special needs sibling may have.

Set aside protected and undivided time for each child to help them feel important.

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