Sibling rivalries are very common. Most brothers and sisters will disagree and fight with each other. This is how children learn to deal with conflict. It is also the way in which children work out their place in the family. Siblings may also compete for your attention and feel jealous of a brother or sister, particularly just after the birth of a new baby. Helping children deal with conflict and learn to get along will help them to form successful relationships outside of the family too.

Feelings

Let your children express their feelings. A child can become very frustrated and angry if misunderstood. Acknowledging that these feelings are real and important can diffuse a situation before it gets out of hand. Use the correct words when talking about anger and frustration. Try saying “I can see that you are angry right now.” This lets your child know that you understand and want to help.

Comparing children to one another can cause jealousy and resentment between them. Never make statements like “Why is you room never as tidy as your brothers?” or “Can’t you help with the chores like your sister?” Instead, tell your child exactly what it is that is bothering you and what you want them to do. Your children need to know that you appreciate them for who they are so make sure you treat each child as an individual and never play favorites. Let your child know what it is that you love about them.

If your children are bickering with one another, don’t take sides. Avoid always blaming one child for starting a fight or causing an argument. Comment on what you can see rather than on who you think started the argument –even if you know who it was. It is tempting to always step in and try to manage conflict situations but give your children the space and the time to try and sort minor conflicts out for themselves. Don’t interfere as long as they are not hurting each other. Let them negotiate with each other and try to resolve the situation on their own.

If your children are hurting each other, however, and their arguing is becoming aggressive and dangerous, you must step in. Set a good example by remaining calm, even if you are angry inside. Once the situation is safe give each child some time and space to calm down. You might need some “alone time” too!

You can help siblings to resolve their conflicts by teaching strategies like taking turns to give opinions. Show your children the way to speak to each other and how to treat other people. Demonstrate sharing a toy rather than grabbing it from someone else and show your children how to take turns.

<http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/sibriv.htm>

University of Michigan: Your Child Development and Behavior Resources

<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Sibling_rivalry>

Better Health Channel: Sibling rivalry

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/pm1529i.pdf>

Iowa State University of Science and Technology: Understanding Children Sibling Rivalry

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/pdfs/SibRiv.pdf>

North Carolina State University: Sibling Rivalry