

# Preventing Unhealthy Sibling Rivalry

## Objective

To hold a family meeting to address ways to prevent unhealthy sibling rivalry.

## What to Know

Siblings often compete to be seen, heard, valued, and validated by their parents. Research indicates that siblings are most competitive with each other between the ages of 10 and 15.

Moments of bickering and rivalry are normal, but there are things you can do to prevent unhealthy sibling rivalry. Here are a few tips:

1. Avoid favoritism and treat each child as a unique individual.
2. Provide appropriate explanations and offer reassurance if your children complain things are unfair.
3. Explain how age affects rules about bedtimes, curfews, and so on.
4. Have one-on-one time with each child, each day, if possible. As little as 15 minutes per child can make them feel valued.
5. Encourage cooperation and teamwork instead of competition.
6. Allow each child to have alone time and space of their own.
7. When children are calm, allow them to express their complaints about siblings. Respond with active listening and empathy.
8. Avoid comparing or labeling your children.
9. Teach problem-solving and negotiation skills, as well as assertiveness, sharing, and emotional intelligence.
10. Be sensitive to the impact of birth order, the arrival of a new baby, and the impact of a child with a chronic illness or disability.
11. Respect the individual personality and temperament of each child.
12. Manage conflict in the family. Help all members of the family see the value of compromise.

## What to Do

First, schedule a family meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

You might say something like this to your children: “We’re going to have a family meeting to talk about sibling relationships. Though you all love each other, there are times when you don’t get along. It’s normal to argue or be irritated or annoyed with each other sometimes. We want

to make sure you can resolve things and not hurt each other in any way. You all need to feel heard, to know you are important, and feel like you can be yourself. It's also important to know that because you are all individuals and different ages, sometimes rules will be a little different, but we don't want you to feel like things are unfair."

During the meeting, all family members should have the opportunity to answer the following questions. One family member might want to take notes.

Ask your children the following questions:

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst and 10 being the best, how well do you get along with your siblings? \_\_\_\_\_

What does it mean to you to be a brother or sister?

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When do you have the most fun with your siblings?

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What makes you angriest with your sibling?

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What can we (*parents*) do to help you when you are angry or upset?

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Do you think we (*parents*) treat you all fairly? Appreciate and value you for who you are?

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Do you spend enough time alone with each parent? Why or why not?

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Do you ever say or do things to your siblings that you later regret? Are you able to apologize? Why or why not?

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Are you allowed to express your anger and other upsetting feelings? Do we (*parents*) help you work through your feelings and help you resolve problems you have with your siblings?

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Do you have time alone in a space that is yours? If not, what can we do to make sure you have alone time in your own space?

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Does everyone agree that when siblings have conflict they should avoid harassing, embarrassing, or demeaning each other? If that happens, what can we do as a family to address it?

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Say three things you like about each other.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

In what ways did having a family meeting effectively address unhealthy sibling rivalry that is happening within your family?

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What question was most beneficial for your family? Explain why.

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Did anything surprise you? Why?

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What was the greatest challenge? Explain.

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How helpful was this worksheet? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this worksheet?

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