

STEP BY STEP



TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

HELPING SIBLINGS GET ALONG

By Ruby M. Johnston

About Step by Step

Parenting is both an exciting and challenging journey. Having a child to love, nurture, and encourage is a blessing. However the journey is filled with challenges which are sometimes puzzling and at other times frustrating. This booklet and others in the series are designed to help you sort through the steps in helping a child grow and develop to reach her fullest potential.

Each booklet contains core information on parenting attitudes, skills and abilities. There are activities to work through to help in applying each strategy. While the booklets contain information which can lead to more effective parenting, it may not answer all the questions a parent might have in the area presented. It is therefore recommended that each and every parent join the thousands of other parents in the journey for lifelong learning. Parenting is a step by step learning process.

We invite you to read all our titles and join us in one of our many different training sessions. We look forward to walking together with you step by step to effective parenting!

Sincerely,

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HELPING SIBLINGS GET ALONG

It is simply a fact of life that siblings don't always get along. Most all adults can remember bickering, arguing or just having hurt feelings due to a sibling disagreement. As parents we want to recognize we cannot eliminate all problems among siblings. However, we can and should do our best to help our children live together as harmoniously as possible.

While parents may become tired of listening to their children's seemingly endless arguments, most would agree that they would not trade their children in for peace and quiet. Sibling relationships might be challenging at times for parents, yet at most times the relationships are exciting and heartwarming to observe.

Children learn through their interactions with their siblings. They learn to resolve conflicts, communicate effectively, and meet their own needs as well as the needs of others.

At times, parents may feel that there is nothing they can do to stop their children from fighting and that their children just have to outgrow this stage. But if conflicts between your children are handled well, they can be reduced.

This booklet will provide you with practical tips which will help you prepare for and respond to your children's conflicts.

The next few pages of this guide contain the following:

- How to prevent sibling rivalry.
- What to do when a parent finds themselves in the middle of a sibling argument.
- How to deal with sibling quarrels and jealousy.
- How to encourage good feelings among siblings.

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HOW TO PREVENT SIBLING RIVALRY

Arguments among brothers and sisters are often the result of sibling rivalry, or competition. Siblings compete for many things including possessions, personal space and parental approval and attention. The following are some tips to help around this rivalry.

- **Give each child his own "things."** Children can't be expected to share everything. Make sure each has some possessions of his own and his own personal space.
- **Avoid comparing your children.** Jealousy is often at the root of sibling rivalry. Saying things like "Why can't you be well-behaved like your brother?" can make a child feel insecure and can provoke arguments.
- **Don't show favoritism.** Make sure that, as much as possible, you treat your children as equals, regardless of their ages. Younger children are bound to feel slighted if an older sibling has a lot of extra privileges. An older child may be upset if she is disciplined more than her younger sibling, who "gets away with everything."
- **Do not worry about treating all your children exactly alike.** Children need comfort, help, and encouragement at different times and in different ways. When a child questions the attention you give to her sibling, reassure her that when she needs help, you will provide it.
- **Pay attention to each of your children and listen to what each has to say.** If you have a baby in the family who demands more attention, let your other children help with the baby's care. But it's a good idea to set aside some alone time with each child daily.
- **Sibling rivalry often is a cry for attention...**so make sure each child is getting enough.

- **Listen to the children's complaints to get clues** to what the "rivals" believe is in short supply.
- **Spend some time alone with each child doing something he or she really enjoys:** taking a walk, reading stories, playing catch-10 minutes a day for a week can do wonders.
- **Let children know you understand their feelings even though you don't agree with them.**
- **If one child says unkind things to you about another, remind him that "she's still one of us" no matter how annoying she is sometimes.** This response reassures the child that *he* would still belong to the family even if a sibling had ill feelings toward *him*.



GETTING OUT OF THE CENTER OF AN ARGUMENT

Arguments between siblings often break out in the presence of a parent. Children look to their parents to resolve their disagreements; however, the parent might be a contributor to additional conflict if the situation is not handled effectively. Here are a few suggestions to help the parent use the situation as a learning opportunity.

- **Always look for a solution rather than a culprit!** By finding a "culprit" the parent teaches the child to blame, tattletale or protect themselves through fighting. It is far more effective to help children find solutions than to find someone to blame.
- **Avoid taking sides.** Family rules can be enforced without blaming a child for causing an argument.

- **When possible, let children resolve their own disputes.**
When children are successful with problem solving, praise them for their success.
- **Teach children to express feelings in appropriate ways.**
- **Use positive methods of intervention when children are hitting or calling each other names.** It is better to separate children when name-calling or hitting occurs than to respond by yelling or ignoring the behavior. It is always important to tell the child they can play together again once they are ready to try again.
- **Remind children they cannot hit or call names –** as it is a rule of our family. (See Quarrels and Fighting below.)
- **Find and use humor when possible.** Humor can cut tension and often helps children to focus on positive aspects of their play rather on conflict. Humor can be a great reliever of the stressful situation of the moment. Remember to never “poke” humor at a child, only at a situation.

Example: Children fighting over a ball – Parent acts like a bear and says, “I am a great burly bear and I am going to eat that ball for getting in the way of your play.” This might be a better response than to grab the ball out the hands of the child and tell them to behave!



QUARRELS AND FIGHTING

- **Ignore as much as possible.** Children often solve their own problems when we allow them to do this. Sometimes paying attention to their arguing teaches children to “hook” you into the problem.

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- **Don't attempt to find out who started things.** Each child will blame the other. This just brings more arguing. Better to separate the children from each other for a few minutes and remind them of the family rules, "We don't fight, or hit. You can play again once you are ready to play without fighting."
- **Allow children to express feelings.** Feelings are okay, while hitting is not okay.
- **Don't reward tattling.**
- **Intervene only when necessary.** Use judgement when to ignore and when to intervene. If children seem to be resolving their disputes, allow resolution to occur. If the quarrel begins to escalate and become physical it is always necessary to intervene.
- **Give praise to children when they show a willingness to share feelings and look for solutions to their conflicts.**



ENCOURAGING GOOD FEELINGS AMONG SIBLINGS

Helping children appreciate each other is rewarding to both children and parents.

- **When possible, allow siblings to settle their own arguments.** Children can often reach the best solution and longest lasting peace if left to their own devices. This allows children to learn valuable skills in conflict resolution.
- **Make sure that each child receives individual attention.** You might use this time to work on a favorite hobby or homework.

- **Give each child possessions and space they can call their own.** Doing this should reduce conflict among children and help children feel important.
- **Establish simple and clear family rules.** This does not mean you should outlaw disagreements. It does mean; however, there is a set way to settle any disagreements that might come up.
- **Encourage positive interactions by helping siblings show kindness and affection to one another.** Allow children times to work together on tasks they enjoy. Ask children to talk about good feelings that result when a child is helpful to a sibling. Let siblings select holiday and birthday presents for one another.
- **Provide each child with an equal share of sincere compliments.** Every child needs the reassurance they are valued and loved by a parent.

Most importantly, remember that there are many benefits to sibling relationships. Young children learn to consider the wants and needs of others, which prepares them for adult relationships.

Parents can encourage togetherness and relationship building by asking siblings to play together, go places together, help each other and help you, the parent, together.

Recognizing their success begins to build their confidence in sharing, playing cooperatively and showing their parents their new abilities to get along well together.



STEPPING INTO SUCCESS

Always set a good example. It is important to follow the family rules. When we teach children that hitting and name-calling are against the family rules, we must keep away from these behaviors ourselves. These practices are ineffective child management and we want to be models for positive behavior. Try not to fight with other adults in front of your children. Adult fighting is very hard for children to understand.

Consider the following strategies:

1. Suggest alternative activities when conflicts occur.
2. Suggest new activities when you see frustrations beginning to surface and before conflicts develop.
3. Ask children what they would like to do together.
4. Encourage children to join in activities with siblings, even those that are not necessarily their favorites.
5. Join your children in their play from time to time.
6. Check in on children playing and comment on how well they are playing together, reward them from time to time for playing together so well.

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FINAL STEP

Success depends on action. Next, you will be considering your children and your own ideas. Be creative and innovative. Remember, your children are your greatest asset. They learn what they live! Your actions are what they live. Now think, have fun and grow your family together.

ASSIGNMENT: Name 10 different ways you might help your children play together, show respect for each other or simply enjoy each other:

Idea 1: _____

Idea 2: _____

Idea 3: _____

Idea 4: _____

Idea 5: _____

Idea 6: _____

Idea 7: _____

Idea 8: _____

Idea 9: _____

Idea 10: _____

NOTES:

OTHER STEP BY STEP TITLES WITH NUMBERS

1. Understanding Child Development – Birth to Two – “The Infant”
2. Understanding Child Development – Three to Five – “The Preschooler”
3. Understanding Child Development – Six to Eleven – “The School Aged Child”
4. Understanding Child Development – Twelve to Fifteen – “The Young Teen”
5. Understanding Child Development – Sixteen to Eighteen – “The Older Teen”
6. Communication – Responding to Children
7. Communication – Feelings
8. Communication – Asking Children Strength- Focused Questions
9. Communication – Being Direct with Children
10. Communication - The Languages of Love for Your Child
11. Communication – What you Say and How you Say It
12. What Every Parent Should Know About Child Abuse
13. Sharing Secrets and Keeping Surprises – James’s Story
14. Teaching Your Child to Say, “NO” – Jessica’s Story
15. Understanding Childhood Illnesses
16. Caring for a Sick Child
17. Disease and How it Spreads
18. First Aide – What Parents Need to Know
19. Home Safety
20. Childproofing Your Home
21. Teaching Safety
22. Food Safety
23. Foodborn Illness
24. Nutrition
25. Feeding Problems
26. Bringing a Foster Child Into Your Home
27. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Family
28. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Marriage
29. Guide to Dealing with Stress As a Parent
30. Guide to Building a Healthy Marriage Relationship
31. Bringing our Adopted Child into Our Home
32. Helping Children Understand Adoption
33. Joining With my Adopted Child’s Culture
34. Understanding the Birth Parent of My Child
35. The Blended Family
36. When Family Members Treat My Foster or Adoptive Child Different
37. Understanding Attachment
38. Recreating History for My Adopted Child
39. Helping the Child who has been Sexually Abused
40. Teaching about Sexuality
 - a. How to Talk to Your Child

- b. How to Talk to Your Parents
41. Understanding Sexual Behaviors
 42. Teaching Your Child about Abstinence
 43. Talking to your Teen about Identity
 44. Contracting with Your Teen About Behavior
 45. Developing Responsibility
 46. Teaching Your Child to Build Relationships
 47. Teaching about Marriage and Family
 48. Telling Your Child Someone has Died
 49. Understanding the Grieving Cycle
 50. Understanding and Approaching Behavior
 51. Dealing with Lying
 52. Toilet Training and Bedwetting
 53. Dealing with Defiance
 54. Dealing with Hitting and Biting
 55. Dealing with Stealing
 56. Dealing with Anger
 57. Dealing with Fighting
 58. The Child Who Plays With Fire
 59. Helping My Child Deal with Fear
 60. Helping My Child Kick a Bad Habit
 61. Help with Tattling
 62. Dealing with the Two Year Old's Temper Tantrum
 63. Help with Thumb Sucking
 64. Help with Bedtime Problems
 65. Dealing with Substance Abuse
 66. Understanding Suicide
 67. Developing Good Study Habits for School
 68. Dealing with Failure
 69. Demonstrating Manners
 70. Helping Siblings Get Along
 71. Nurturing Optimism

MORE TITLES TO BE DEVELOPED IN THE FUTURE

REFERENCES FOR BOOKLET

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