



Brothers At Arms

Strategies to stop sibling squabbles and save your sanity this summer. *By Kathleen Siddell*

When Laura's children, Jimmy and Carolyn, were ages 6 and 4 respectively, Jimmy made up a game called "Jimmy Ball", loosely based on Wiffle Ball. The rules constantly changed, and the summer seemed endless after playing a game that always resulted in tears and hotly contended wins and losses. Laura now refuses to play, yet the game continues with friends. "Everything is a competition in our house."

All parents can relate to stories of competition in the household and hurt feelings. It's one thing to fight with friends, but when that friend is a sibling, it can make those long summer days feel like an eternity. While most family photos capture the best of togetherness, they may mask the more unpleasant, but common, pitfalls of too much togetherness—sibling rivalry.

Roots of rivalry

Sibling rivalry is a normal and common part of growing up. While it usually takes the form of harmless—but annoying—bick-

ering, parents should try to address the underlying issues causing the tension so the rivalry does not continue into adulthood. Most sibling rivalry will ebb and flow as your children's relationships grow and mature, and can ultimately help them appreciate the special bond siblings share.

Most sibling rivalry stems from feelings of unfairness and jealousy and can manifest in a variety of behaviors. While name calling and lashing out are the most common, other actions include hitting, pulling hair or more aggressive physical contact. In Deborah Skolnik's parenting article, "Dealing with Sibling Rivalry," child and family psychotherapist Frances Walfish says, "The rivalry you see—whether your children are fighting for a toy or the first turn on a swing—is really rooted in a struggle for your love and attention." These fights might be exasperating or make you wonder what happened to your well-behaved babies, but remember that the bad behavior is the result of complicated feelings.

The second coming

Sibling rivalry can begin as soon as the second child is born. The first-born, used to receiving undivided attention, may not understand how a parent's love deepens and expands with the introduction of a new sibling. They may begin to act out and seek your attention, even if it's negative attention. But as children grow and the family adjusts, sibling rivalry usually lessens.

Lisa, mother of two boys, 16 and 14, states, "I think their rivalry will always exist but they're getting better at managing it themselves. I don't hear as many arguments as I used to, but I think it's because they are probably happening behind closed doors or on the baseball field."

Like Lisa's boys, some sibling rivalries can be exacerbated when both children are involved in the same activities, have the same interests, or are close in age. "It is natural for siblings close in age to compare themselves to one another as they may

share the same social circles or interests, but this also presents a wonderful opportunity for them to develop a close bond between siblings," says Zachary Beck Goss, family and youth counselor at the Community Center Shanghai.

Catrin, mother of Charlotte, 11, and Matilde, 9, agrees. While her girls bicker about who gets to take care of younger brother Oskar, 2, they look out for one another, too. During a conflict at school, her girls stood up for one another when some boys were picking on them. "It makes me happy that they stick together during times like that."

Curbing conflict

So what do you do when you're certain your head will actually explode if you hear, "Mom, she took my (insert favorite item of the week) again!" one more time? Luckily, since sibling rivalry is as old as Cain and Abel, there is plenty of advice for parents to try out:

- Allow your children to deal with smaller squabbles independently. Knowing when


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to step in is the tricky part. "If parents do step in, it is important not to take sides or dismiss one or the other's feelings as that can lead to more feelings of resentment," says Sheri Deneef, lower school counselor at Shanghai Community International School, Pudong.

- Separate your children.
- Take away the toy or object at the center of the conflict.
- Avoid comparing your children to each other and to others.
- Allow your children to have something that is theirs alone, especially effective for older kids.
- Arrange a special day for each child where

they choose the activity and receive your undivided attention.

Unique & valued

Because the feelings that underlie most sibling rivalries are complex, stopping the fighting will likely only help in the short term. For long-term success, the single piece of advice that is echoed by all experts and parents is to help your children develop their strengths and value themselves as individuals. Each family, child and relationship is different, so what works for one family may not work for another. "Unfortunately, there is no blanket solution and no standard course to follow because relationships evolve and change," says Goss. "Highlight your children's strengths." Most importantly, ensure each child feels important, supported, unique and loved. 

Educational Characteristics

English 70%, Chinese 15% and Japanese 15% International Learning environment



Extra curricular activities and Special programs all year long



Development of interpersonal relationships
A weekly curriculum set to help children master activities of daily living



halloween

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