

**Tips For Handling Sibling Rivalry**

from the American Counseling Association

If there is more than one child in your family, then it's almost a guarantee that there are disagreements, arguments and competition. Yes, your children may love one another, but siblings will still disagree and fight and drive most parents crazy.

It's called "sibling rivalry," a competition to be number one in the parents' eyes. This probably can be traced back to prehistoric ancestors when being number one could be a matter of survival. Today, it's more about simply having parental approval.

Young children will naturally feel threatened when a sibling is born. They see parental love as limited and finite, but suddenly there's someone new to love, meaning less love for the older child.

It's not an irrational fear. A new baby is usually the center of attention and, out of necessity, takes up more of the parents' time. The older child probably feels he or she is suddenly less important and starts to misbehave to win back more attention.

The cure for that problem is to demonstrate to your children that you love them all. Simply saying it has no real affect, but when you set aside "special time" for the older child, offer your focused attention, and give plenty of hugs and reassurances, you're demonstrating your love and overcoming his or her sense of feeling threatened.

For an older child, it's not jealousy over parental love, but about winning parental attention. Siblings may compete to have better grades, be better in sports, or demonstrate better musical or artistic skills.

This can be good, if kept under control, leading to higher levels of accomplishment. But praising a higher-achieving child shouldn't be at the expense of the other children. If one child is always "winning," you may want to tip the scales slightly and give the other children extra attention and time.

But competition can get out of hand, threatening family peace and harmony, and possibly doing physical or emotional harm to one or the other children. That's when help is needed.

School counselors are often excellent sources of advice on excessive levels of sibling rivalry. A professional counselor specializing in family issues could also help.

While a little friendly sibling competition can sometimes be a good motivator, don't let it destroy family peace and happiness. If you work to be fair with your love and attention, you may find sibling rivalry will lessen and disappear.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

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