



Cultivating Strong and Healthy Sibling Relationships

Let's talk about cultivating positive bonds between siblings. For a child, having a sibling often means having a constant companion who can provide support, love, and care for the rest of their life. Sibling relationships often reflect the overall cohesiveness within a family. It's normal for parents to feel overwhelmed by family dynamics, especially when refereeing the latest he-said-she-said debate. How did this argument start anyway, and why did it end in tears?

While sibling conflict feels exhausting in the moment, it can help kids in the long run. When kids work through uncomfortable feelings and difficult problems with their siblings, they learn how to manage emotions and conflicts in the world. When parents help kids with these skills and support each child equally, kids have a training ground to cope with the ups and downs of childhood.

There are many benefits of positive sibling relationships, including support, friendship, and connection. Research shows that sibling relationships can increase sympathy, which can foster other prosocial behaviours like helping and sharing. By fostering the sibling relationship, parents teach young children to show empathy and compassion for others.

Here are a few ways we can help our little ones reap the benefits of their sibling relationships and turn arguments into lifelong lessons:

1. Keep a check on your own emotions when the kids argue:

It's natural and normal to feel heated when your kids often get into arguments. You might feel compelled to send everyone to separate corners, but this action may convey the message that negative emotions are bad and problems are solved by hiding in different corners. Tread carefully; young children watch their parents for cues on managing conflict and coping with big emotions. This is a good time to model the power of deep breathing. For example, say, "I feel upset by the yelling in our house right now. Let's take three deep breaths together and try to solve the problem."

2. Encourage siblings to nurture one another:

When one sibling is hurt, encourage the other to check on them. When one needs help with a task, encourage the others to jump in and get the job done. When they argue, help them verbalize their feelings using "I feel" statements so they can listen to and empathize with one another. Teach your kids that they always have each other for help, support, or just to have fun, emphasizing that their relationship is grounded in unconditional love.

3. Create sibling special time:

We often talk about the importance of the parent-child relationship and their special time, but sibling special time is a great way to ensure that your kids have the opportunity to build a strong bond. Plan games where they can team up, take responsibilities, listen to one another's ideas, and create something new together. Then step back and let them manage each other.

4. Get siblings in on the night time routine:

Though siblings compete, fight, or have different opinions, they often enjoy their night time routine together. Encourage siblings to read one story together, sing each other a song or give hugs and high fives before they drift off to sleep. This creates a special bond and teaches kids that they can turn to one another for support if they ever feel unsettled at night.

5. Cheer each other on:

Kids will compare themselves to one another at times. Sometimes they try to learn from each other; other times, they try to figure out how they stack up. Celebrate the diversity of strengths within the family. Teach your kids to cheer each other on, offer help, and recognize each other's strengths. When siblings learn from an early age that they aren't in competition and that they have the power to help each other thrive, their relationship thrives.

Sibling relationships are among the most important and enduring relationships we have in our lives. Before even making friends, siblings are often the first people we form bonds with. They can be our closest friends, greatest rivals, and confidants all at the same time. While friendships come and go, you're stuck with your siblings. This relationship is oftentimes one of the longest relationships in a person's life. You can rarely get away with being fake or phony with siblings. You grow up in the same environment, share the same parents, and share common memories and similar experiences. You are who you are because of this shared history, which makes the relationship unique and invaluable. Thus, it becomes very important to maintain positive relationships between siblings.

With best wishes,
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