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Helping Your Child Deal With The Birth Of A New Sibling

By Sarah Veda

If you're pregnant with your second child, it's time to be thinking about how to prepare your first child to deal with "not being an only child" anymore. This can be a difficult transition for any child, and most, regardless of age, have some adjustments to make. Here are some suggestions to help your child be prepared.

- Talk about how special it is to be a big brother or sister. Discuss the baby in terms of how important the older sibling will be in its life. This is your child's chance to be the big kid, which is usually a very appealing idea.
- If you've been thinking about putting your child into a preschool program, now is the time. Don't wait until after the baby comes, or she might feel like you're trying to get rid of her. She should have time to make friends and get adjusted before the baby comes, and then she will enjoy the chance to get away.
- Get her used to being away from you. If your child spends most of her waking hours in your care, it's time to start having someone else take over some of this time for you. Maybe start using a sitter a little more, or sending her to play at a friend's. This way, when the baby starts to demand your attention, she will be accustomed to having other caretakers.
- Don't plan any major changes for her right after the baby is born. The adjustment to the baby is plenty, so don't try potty training, or changing her sleeping arrangements during this time. If you can't get these things accomplished before the baby comes, plan to put it off a few months.
- Familiarize her with babies in general, particularly the amount of care they require. Talk to her about when she was a baby, and all the things that she did. Then when the new baby comes, she will have something to relate to.
- Let her assist you with any baby preparations that she would like to help with, but don't force her. She might think its fun to pick out nursery items, for example.

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· Prepare her for the time you'll be spending in the hospital, and explain what the situation will be like. If you can make it special for her, so much the better. When my daughter was born, we had arranged for my four year old son's favorite aunt and uncle to come and stay with him at our house while I was in the hospital. He was looking so forward to their visit; he hardly noticed I was away.

No matter how well you prepare your child, there is bound to be some difficulty in adjusting to the new baby. My son thought his little sister was cool, but he didn't much care for the fact that I was her Mommy, too. It takes a little time, but things work out well in the end. And, anything you can do to prepare them ahead of time will only make the transition easier.

Sarah is a 41 year old wife and mother of two boys and one girl. She spent many years as a manager in the corporate world, and gave it up to be a stay at home mom. Go to

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How to Deal with Sibling Rivalry

By Anthony Kane, MD

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Introduction

There are many new issues facing parents today. Sibling rivalry is not one of them. It is as old as Cain and Abel.

Sibling rivalry is universal, but more importantly sibling rivalry is normal. More than that current research shows that sibling rivalry is a sign of a healthy family. One of the sign of a dysfunctional home or a home where there is a lot of stress is that there is no sibling rivalry. In these homes the children tend to cling together for security.

So if sibling rivalry is universal and it is found in normal homes, it must serve a purpose.

The Benefits of Sibling Rivalry

One of the main benefits that sibling rivalry teaches children is conflict resolution. Life is full of conflict. As adults we have developed skills to resolve these conflicts in an effective and civil manner. How did

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we develop these skills? We learned this by pounding our little brother. We learned this by fighting with our big sister.

You can learn certain skills by arguing with your parents, but it is not the same. Through your parents you learn how to deal with authority. But siblings are peers. Learning how to relate to them properly prepares us to relate to our friends and our spouses.

You can only learn conflict resolution when there is conflict. Sibling rivalry provides a safe and supervised haven for children to learn how to resolve their disagreements with others.

The second important lesson that we learn through sibling rivalry is that the world is not fair. This is a very important and bitter lesson to learn. There is always some who will do better than you. There is always someone who is richer, who is smarter, who has better behaved children, who has a happier marriage. Life is full of inequities. We may not like it but most of us have come to terms with these inequities.

Where did we learn to accept that everything is not always distributed evenly? We learned it from our siblings.

How to Manage Sibling Rivalry

Now that we have a framework for what children accomplish through sibling rivalry, we can understand better how we as parents can use our children's relationships with each other to help them grow into healthy normal adults.

How to Oversee the Conflict Resolution

Since the purpose of sibling rivalry is to learn how to resolve conflicts with others, you should as much as possible let your children work out disputes themselves. You should direct them when necessary, but the idea is to give them as little direction as possible.

What You Should Do

Create a situation where the motivation is to resolve their differences. There are times they can't work it out— so you coach them give them ideas how to compromise but the best thing is to have them resolve it themselves.

For example, say they are fighting over a toy. One child says he had it first. The other says he didn't get to play with it at all yesterday and now it's his turn.

Who is right? That is impossible to say. So what could you do? Tell them you don't know who is right about the toy, but if they are fighting about it they are both wrong. Then take it away from them and tell

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them that when they work out a way of sharing it they can have it back. You will be surprised how fast most children will be able to work out something.

What You Should Not Do

Do not try to figure out who started it. In most cases you will never resolve this. More than that, any attempt to figure out who is the aggressor almost always makes things worse.

Usually both children are at fault. Fighting with someone else is wrong. Once there is a fight they are automatically both wrong. What caused the fight becomes secondary.

What to Watch Out For

Your job as a parent is not to solve your children's problems, but to teach them how to solve them themselves. They must learn to make compromises. As much as possible they should be the ones who work out the compromise. However, there are some things you should watch for to be sure they are doing a good job.

Make Sure Compromise is Reasonable

You don't want to let one child bully the other into submission. You have to make sure there is no coercion.

Be on Alert for the Child Who is too Good

Some children avoid conflict by nature. They would rather give in and be the "good one" than get what they were originally after. If one of your children is like this you have to be on guard.

Constantly giving in is not acceptable. It is not good for the child who gives in because it trains him to be a target to be easily exploited. It is not good for the other child because it teaches him to take advantage of the good nature of others. You must make sure that each child gets something out of the compromise.

Special Situations:

An Impulsive or Inflexible Child

Some children have specific problems, like being impulsive or inflexible. This may require you to intervene more often.

Still whenever possible it is better to let the children resolve their conflicts themselves. In most cases, when you make your children responsible for solving their own problems, they will be very quick to work out a solution.

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Teenagers

The teen years are a special topic by itself and clearly not enough has been written on it. However, I am going to address only a few points here.

When Your Teen Fights with Your Seven Year Old

There are two very common reasons an older child will fight with a much younger child. The first is he feels the younger child is an imposition. We as parents use our older children to help us with the younger ones. This is good for both children. Yet at times the older child can feel that he is being forced into a parental role that he is not quite ready to fill. When this happens the child will begin to resent the burden of the younger sibling and this will result in fighting.

A second common cause is that teens are very possessive of what is theirs. Your average six year old may not understand this. He might take be used to playing with his nine year old brothers things, but when he takes the same liberties with what he finds on his teenage sister's shelf get quite a different response. Teens have a need for privacy and boundaries around what is their own. This need is normal and is part of the developmental stage that they are in. When a younger child transgresses those boundaries fights will ensue.

Treating Your Children Equitably

As I mentioned earlier, one of the things that sibling rivalry teaches is that things in life are not always fair. We have to keep this in mind when relating to our children.

Do Not Get Hung Up on Making Things Fair

Life is not fair. You probably know this by now. Your children need to learn this, too.

This does not mean you want to intentionally discriminate between your children. However, you should not knock yourself out trying to treat each child equally, for two reasons:

- 1– Your children will not learn the important lesson that life is not always fair.
- 2– You are doomed to fail. All you will accomplish is to frustrate yourself.

You can't make things fair. Nor can you give to each child equally. Your relationship with each child is unique. This does not mean that you don't love your children, but each one has a special type of relationship with you that is uniquely his.

You should make an effort to be sure that the discrepancies are not extreme. You should be sure to give to each child what he or she needs. However, you are not being a bad parent by not treating to

each of your children equally. That is life.

When You Can't Minimize the Differences

Not all children are equally easy to raise. Some children need a disproportionate amount of your time and attention and resources. This is a reality. You will not be able to spread yourself out evenly. There is nothing you can do about this.

If you have a child that needs an exorbitant amount of attention, for example if the child is chronically ill, then you should discuss this with the other children. Explain to them that their brother or sister is ill and needs a lot of attention right now. You might even try to get them involved in helping the sick child.

Conclusion

Sibling rivalry is one of the least discussed topics in child raising. Yet sibling rivalry is part of every family when there is more than one child. Not only that, but also sibling rivalry plays an important part in molding each child. How a person acts as an adult is in a large part a result of his relationships with his siblings.

Your job as a parent is to educate your child to be able to function as an adult. You should use how your children relate to each other as a tool so that they can learn to relate to others in the future.

Anthony Kane, MD is a physician and international lecturer. Get

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