

What causes sibling rivalry? essay sample

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Sibling rivalry will always occur in a household of more than one child whether through comparison, fighting, jealousy, or by other means. Parents and children both contribute to the rivalry. It will occur on a daily, weekly, and even an hourly basis. Sibling rivalry may become difficult and annoying to parents, but they must deal with it day after day. In definition, sibling rivalry is when one sibling or more compete with one another or try to emulate each other. Rivalry is different from fighting. It appears when children compete for their parents' love and attention (Faull 88).

Sibling relationships can be a key to rivalry. An intense relationship includes love and hate, play and fight, and the teasing and mocking of each other. There are some questions on why certain siblings get along harmoniously and affectionately, while there are others that constantly fight (Dunn front flap). Siblings usually have a very harsh relationship when they are young. As they mature, they become better friends and start getting into fewer and fewer fights. Brothers and sisters sometimes work together to get through jams. Siblings occasionally team up to trick or get back at a parent in revenge (Faber and Mazlish 27-28). Aggression is very frequent in sibling relationships. In one study, 29% of behavior observed between siblings was hostile (Dunn 22). It is usually the older child being aggressive to the younger one, but the younger child may become increasingly aggressive as he/she grows. In one Canadian study, a family where the mother is very friendly to the second born at the eight month stage, the two children were very opposed to each other six months later (Dunn 98). There are many siblings that take their aggression to the extremes, and others who travel

through phases of rivalry, then end in a close, loving relationship (“Sibling Aggression”). Plus, not all rivalry is negative.

Birth order greatly affects the relationships between siblings. Frank J. Sulloway, writer of *Born to Rebel*, had this to say about birth order, “Few aspects of human behavior can claim such generalizability (as birth order) across class, nationality, gender, and time.” Birth order is the ultimate cause of behavior; it is destiny—if not entirely, then pretty nearly so (Epstein 51). First children tend to accomplish more than their siblings do because their parents expect more of them. All children in a family behave differently because of the way they are or were treated by their parents and others. The first child is very bossy to younger sibs, and has strong beliefs about what is right or wrong, and how his younger sibs should behave. He/she does not let the younger ones get away with something they could not do at their age. The second or middle child does not expect to get his or her own way much. They learn to achieve what they want through indirect means. The third or youngest child learns that the best method for him to get his way is by being nice. He frequently does what he wants and gets away with it because others do not notice (Ames and Haber 63-66).

Sibling rivalry has many causes that both parents and children can bring about. Parents create rivalry problems by comparison and favoritism. They have to see their kids as separate individuals, and not compare them. The parents have to make sure that comparisons do not lead to them buying one thing for a child’s need, and then buying the same item for the other child even though he does not need it. There are certain types of comparison:

positive and pressure. Positive comments can start problems between siblings (i. e. “ I see from your homework that you are a math whiz, just like your sister!” Kent 80). “ Children may feel resentful when parents push them into each other’s turf,” reports Kathy Thorburg, Ph. D (quoted in Kent 80). When a parent compares two siblings, it puts pressure in sports, school, and any other aspects of life on the younger child . Parents inadvertently play favorites with their children. The favorite child may not always be the cutest, smartest, kindest, or most thoughtful. It is natural to feel a preference to one child, and those feelings are probably obvious to the rest of the family (Ames and Haber 40). It is not humanly possible for a parent to love each child the same. Even if one of the parents has a favored one, they must not show it (Faber and Mazlish 96).

Children can cause their own rivalry without any input from parents. Fighting is not rivalry, but is sometimes caused by it. Sometimes children pick fights with their sibs because they are mad at themselves and there is no one else to take out their anger on. Other times, kids may pick a fight because they are mad at a friend or parent. Because they cannot hit their mother or father, the child usually uses his sibling as the punching bag. Some children fight just to see the show their parents put on when they come to yell at the guilty instigator. Many youngsters fight just because of boredom. It makes the older sibling feel power and gives them strength, like a big shot (Faber and Mazlish 148-149). The changes of a blended family may make the child angry, and he takes it on one of his sibs even though he is mad at his parents. “ It is always more complicated in a blended family, because there so many more people to deal with,” states Lois Kalafas, a clinical social

worker in Boston. Jealousy of other children plays a role in sibling rivalry. When a new child comes into a household, a rivalry has already started. It is a competition for attention. If a second marriage produces another child, the existing children feel like they will lose their love and attention from their parents (Brink B4).

There are some techniques on how to deal with sibling rivalry. A family meeting is a good way to discuss problems. When you call a meeting, the parent must explain the purpose of the meeting. Write down what each child feels and read it aloud to both children. Allow each child time for a response. Then let everyone in the family suggest as many solutions as they can think of. Lastly, decide on the solutions that your family can handle (Faber and Mazlish 166-168). There are some other techniques to prevent rivalry between siblings. The parent should always send the instigator to his respective room. Holler at the older one and tell him to act mature because he should be an exemplary for the younger sib. Do not raise a hand to the children no matter how angry and annoyed the parent becomes.

Sibling rivalry is a big problem in homes all across America and the rest of the world. It occurs day and night and is very difficult to deal with. Parents must be strong and willing to tackle this rivalry before they have children, and they must be mature enough to handle it. Parents and families are guaranteed to experience some form of sibling rivalry, so they had better be prepared.