Communication strategies in intimate sibling relationships essay

Case Scenario Marie recently graduated high school and in the fall will be leaving to attend a university, her brother, Dan, is younger than her by three years and has just finished his freshman year of high school.

Over the course of the summer months Marie has been busy preparing herself for her first semester in college, while her parents have been scrambling to make sure she makes the adjustment smoothly into college. On the other hand, Dan has spent the majority of his summer working at the local supermarket, playing video games, and hanging out at the pool. In the times between, Dan tries to spend time with his family and sister, but feels like his parents don't spend any time with him; Marie feels, however, that when she doesn't have time to spend with anyone, let alone her brother. She believes Dan is smothering her and wants something from her that she doesn't have right now. Dan gripes and complains that Marie gets all the attention and claims that no one cares about him.

What complicates their problems even more is their age difference, while Marie is entering a turning point in her life and maturity, she feels that Dan is stuck in the same high school mentality, Dan just feels that his sister is acting like something she's not. Definition and Analysis of Sibling Rivalry One of the most frequently-occurring relationship difficulties occurs between siblings. Sibling rivalry is any form of competition or animosity between brothers and/or sisters; whether or not they are related by blood. Most people in western cultures have at least one sibling, logically following; siblings spend more time together throughout childhood and adolescence than they do with their parents. There are many factors that complicate the

brotherly or sisterly bond that sibling share; parental treatment, age, birth order, experiences and other people.

What makes sibling rivalry a very pertinent issue to the human condition is its prevalence throughout recorded history. For believers of Christian theology, there is the story of Cain and Abel, scholars of ancient history note the conflict between mythological Romulus and Remus, tennis pros Venus and Serena Williams, column writer Ann Landers and Abigail Van Buren and the list continues. Sibling rivalry includes a host of different manifestations from its most mild form of competition, to extreme cases where they may be physical and/or emotional violence. Rivalry between brothers, sisters, or brothers and sisters can many times occur after the birth of a second child to one parent or both.

In many cases, however, sibling rivalry starts before the arrival of a younger sibling. This tension and lack of understanding of the events taking place manifests itself in children and adolescents as they begin to become aggressive and resistant toward their parent or parents. What separates this communication problem from most others is that because the problems often manifest when children are young, it is difficult for parents to communicate with them; these problems in turn, translate to adolescence and adulthood, and often adult siblings fight for the exact same reasons young children do. At that stage in their life, however, the now adult siblings are more apt to physically, emotionally, and intellectually harm each other and to be hurt by each other. Lifetimes of patterns of communication has essentially set themselves in stone, and are difficult to change.

Considering the above scenario Marie and Dan have experienced many of the common problems with sibling rivalry, minus the emotional or physical abuse. However, because of their age difference, birth order, and perceptions of how their parents treat them, their once competitive relationship has turned ugly. In this specific case one sees two individuals who are essentially competing to define who they are, at the same time one seeks to identify herself separate from her family, while the younger is confused about the turning point in his and his sister's lives. Our male sibling feels that his female counterpart receives a disproportionate amount of their parents' attention and responsiveness, and this in turn opens him to a range of emotions.

To her, however, the constant attention is welcome as she enters a new stage of her life. He is frustrated with his parents, but at the same time, he knows he will miss his lifelong partner, and seeks to bond with her at times that are convenient to him. Meanwhile, Marie is entering a new stage in her life and feels pressured to change who she is and define that individual. It is inconvenient for her to be with Dan at any given time, as she feels that he is second to her impending enrollment. Because of the lack of intervention from their parents, Dan and Marie continue to bicker with each other and the problems are likely to escalate. (Boyse, 2008) Criteria and Guidelines for CommunicationProblems in this specific situation will continue to deteriorate lest Dan and Marie begin to communicate with each other beyond their gestures.

Verbalizing their sentiments is much more likely to alleviate their problems because it presents them in an open ground. Marie and Dan will have to

begin communicating with each other without interruption. Much of the confusion in sibling relationships is grounded in the expectations of each sibling; brothers and sisters often expect the other to already know how they are feeling based on their relationship. However, that is often not the case, and subliminal messages often go unnoticed by the other sibling. There will need to be an understanding of where the present emotions come from and an avenue for each sibling to work out how they feel.

The guidelines for their dialogue should go as follows: 1. Each sibling begins their statement with " I feel (that/like/as if). " This allows each person to voice their problems without accusing the other 2. Siblings also need to consciously allow the other space and ask permission before they try to spend time with one another. 3. Siblings need to begin understanding who each of them are, separate from the other; and begin forming their identities accordingly Communicating in such a way will allow for a greater level of growth in any sibling relationship and allow it to endure over the tough turning points in the near future.

Brainstorming Possible Solutions There are many possible solutions to the problems plaguing Dan and Marie's sibling relationship. In response we have formulated several solutions to the problems. Not only are they applicable in this specific scenario, but they can be translated to solve problems in any sibling relationship. Reacting to how Dan believes Marie to be receiving more attention than him, it seems that Dan's perception is skewed by his sister's leaving for college and the focus placed on her by her parents. He seems to not understand that Marie leaving for college is a turning point in her life and relationship with her family, thus a disproportionate amount of attention is

placed on her for the time being as her parents scramble to make sure she adjusts well.

One solution to this problem would be for Dan to express his feelings to Marie and his parents, to air the problems and disclose them for an open line of communication. Acting upon this it would be wise for his parents to spend time with both Marie and Dan, whether separately or together is another issue. Another problem that these two have manifests itself in Marie feeling as though her brother places too much pressure on her and wants to spend too much time together; she feels as though her younger sibling is smothering her. In response to this, there could many possible avenues to take, but a few would be for Marie to quietly distance herself from her brother, being careful however not to alienate him.

This in turn gives Marie the space that she craves, and spares Dan's feelings. It would be wise, however, for Marie to also verbalize how she feels toward her brother and assume agency in their relationship and assert her independence. Doing so would allow Marie to become an active part and see to it that the relationship does not overwhelm her. It would be necessary for her to understand, however, her sibling's mixed feelings and also understand his standpoint in the matter.

Because of the changes in her life, Marie tends to act differently, and feels that she should not have to spend much time with her younger brother, while Dan sees this change as unexpected and unwarranted. It is necessary then for Marie to actively integrate Dan in parts of her life and newly found identity, at the same time Dan must come to terms with his sister's turning

point and realize the new version of Marie. Many of these problems are also confounded by Marie and Dan's difference in gender, sex and age. There is a large enough age gap for there to be differences in maturity, however they are not quite understood by the two parties. At the same time, differences in Marie and Dan's gender and sex add to the problems of how they cannot communicate properly.

Marie and Dan need to understand the dynamics of masculine and feminine communication types. There are many things that need to be discussed but the subject varies. Final Solutions Detachment and Trial Separation Weighing the pros and cons of each issue there are three possible avenues that the siblings can take in order to reach greater understanding of the dynamics of their relationship. One issue is siblings' attachment to one another.

According to Attachment Theory individuals' orientations toward intimacy are shaped at very early relationships with caregivers.. Dan has been influenced by Marie in the very early stage of high school. The experience decisively influenced how Dan viewed himself, how he viewed others, and relationships he has build in high school according to attachment theory by John Bowlby (1973). Like many sibling that attend high school together they become attached, no exception to Dan and Marie.

There are three different types of attachment style. One, Secure attachment – is the most common and the most likely to promote positive conceptions of self and others. , Anxious-avoidant attachment – tends to develop when a caregiver is consistently negative, disinterested, rejecting, or, in extreme cases, abusive. This attachment style is not applicable to Dan and Marie, but

not all siblings are like them and some siblings to have this kind of very negative attachment style.

Three, Anxious-resistant attachment – Sometimes caregiver is compassionate and involved, at other times indifferent or cruel. The third type of attachment style is most common among most families. Most siblings cannot always be responsive to each other positively. Even the most loving family members may be forced away, leaving the other family member feeling abandoned by the person it trusts. By defining the three styles form attachment theories; we have placed Dan's attachment at secure attachment during the freshmen, but that is about to change to anxious-resistant attachment which could be hazardous to their relationship. Dan is scared that he has to start his sophomore year without the support of Marie a sister he was attached to during the previous year.

It is always difficult to part way and when relationships are faced with this issue like Marie and Dan the most obvious response is dissatisfaction Macklin (1980). How should Marie communicate with Dan? Only thing Marie should not do is just leave without talking to Dan. ption is for Dan and Marie to take recess; not because they have an unsatisfying sibling relationship, but because physically they have to. Recess with good explanation and communication has a very positive outcome allowing sibling to become closer than ever as brother and sister. As of now Marie is capturing all the attentions of their parents.

Great thing about taking a recess aka Trial Separation in this case is because once Marie leaves off to college Dan will have chance to spend quality time

with the parents and discuss some of the issues that he is facing in high school. The separation will allow Dan and Marie to grow individually while temporary separated, Richard Conville (1988). Dan will learn to be independent and when he meets Marie they will have so much more to talk about and share personal experiences. The relationship will be stronger than ever due to the fact that they had time to mature and create personal identity. Like many solutions to relationship questionnaires there is no one shoot deal.

Marie and Dan has to keep an open communication system, so that every time Marie distances herself form Dan, he know that this is just a temporary good-bye bettering each other. Every time Dan and Marie communicate after recess they will grow more intimately as sibling. The most import thing is not allowing the communication take a negative turn because this will poison the sibling intimacy. There a Korean proverb, " You can payoff a thousand years of debt with good communication…" Meaning there is nothing you can not resolve with communication. Placemaking and Daily Rituals All these problems add up to Dan to having toward his sister Marie. Dan is jealous of his sister because she is receiving all the attention from their parents while Dan y.

is receiving less attention than usual. This adds up to Dan feeling he is not loved by his parents. Dan has jealousy towards his sister because jealousy happens when something that the person values might be taken away or in danger while envy is more likely to come about when the other person wants to have another person's trait, like beauty or intelligence. (Friedley, 2005; Parrot, 1991) However if jealousy is not quickly defused this can result in an

unhealthy relationship between the two siblings which could result in Dan having envy towards his sister. This could cause an unhealthy relationship which can lead to Dan having envy towards Marie.

An unhealthy relationship is a relationship where violence is involved whether it is physical or mental. (Wood, 2000; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998) This relates to envy because usually when someone is envious of another they wish ill upon that person. (Friedley, 2005) There is nothing that Dan wants from his sister he is just angry because she is receiving all the attention. The best way to relieve these types of feelings between siblings is to make the one that is feeling jealous that they are loved just as much.

One of the solutions to the problem of sibling jealousy is to create a daily ritual which is the basic fabric of any relationship. Bolger & Kelleher, 1993; Duck, 1994; Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991) A daily ritual is neither necessary or for comfort but it is something that is done on a daily basis to help establish relationships between two people. (Wood, 2000) Dan and his sister can create a daily ritual where they communicate with each other and share their feelings. This will help defuse the jealousy that Dan is having towards his sister because in communicating with each other Marie can share her feelings. This will help Dan understand why their parents might be spending a little more time with her during this difficult time of transition.

Communication between in general is extremely important to establish a sibling bond so that jealousy does not take control of the relationship. Standpoints and Maintaining Relationships The third possible explanation of sibling rivalry is that Dan and Marie come from different standpoints. The

Standpoint theory is the social, material, and symbolic circumstances of a social group that shapes how members perceive, interpret, and act towards events, situations, others, and themselves (Wood, 2000). One way of relieving tension between siblings is for them to understand the different standpoints in relationships more effectively. In this case, the main difference is the gendered standpoints, masculine and feminine, that follows unique speech communities (Labov, 1972).

Speech communities, as Labov (1972) explains, is the " particular experiences of a social group that leads to a group-specific communication pattern. " There are endless number of speech communities; gender has received the most attention in different speech communities because it is primarily how Western societies organize and categorize themselves (Bem, 1993; Janeway, 1971; Miller, 1986; Wood, 1993). Dan is at a place where he longs for attention, affection, and love from his sister who will be leaving for college. He believes that their relationship should be an ongoing, continuous process where new understandings and experiences are to be constant; he belongs in the feminine standpoint (Gilligan 1982; Wood, 1986, 1993).

Although Dan may be jealous of Marie for receiving more attention from their parents, he wants to further build and connect with his sister. He may perceive Marie's lack of interest in talking or spending more time together as evidence that she cares less about the relationship he does. He might say " you never spend time with me! " to express his feelings. Marie, leaning more towards the masculine standpoint in this relationship, may view that commitment has already been established so therefore is no need to continually commit or give special attention to the relationship with his

brother. She may view occasional sit-down meals watching television with Dan as her way of expressing affection. Keep in mind that men are not always classified in masculine standpoints; women are not always classified in feminine standpoints either.

ConclusionSibling relationships are one of the few that we don't necessarily voluntarily commit ourselves to. We are born into a collection of pre-established identities and because of this we find ourselves from birth born into a dynamic that will shape our patterns of communication for their rest of our lives. It's necessary then for people who are knowledgeable and willing to learn successful communication to learn the tactics that allow for peaceful and productive relationships in work and life. Because of the permanence of sibling relationships its imperative that these skills be learned as soon as individuals are able. While most relationships with siblings will be rocky, its also important to note that when siblings do disagree it's a sign of relationship health, as it means one sibling is asserting their identity and no one sibling is completely dominant over the other.

There are issues however that must be resolved through some form of dialogical communication. Works Cited (in alphabetical order) Bem, S. (1993). The lenses of gender. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Bolger, N.

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