

# PARENTING FOR HEALTHY SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS



FAMILY THERAPY  
CENTER OF BETHESDA

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This information sheet summarizes information from "**Siblings Without Rivalry**", a fabulous parenting book by **Adele Farber** and **Elaine Mazlish**. This book is great for advice on parenting your children to have healthy relationships with each other for their sake and yours.

## DON'T COMPARE

Comparison is not only the thief of joy, it is also the thief of loving and healthy sibling relationships. It is important as a parent to make sure you avoid comparison between your children even if it seems small and harmless. If you find yourself about to make a comparative statement between siblings, instead only discuss the behavior that you like/don't like by:

- Describing what you see
- Describing how you feel
- Describing what you want them to do

## ALLOW THEM TO EXPRESS

It is normal for siblings to have strong emotions toward each other sometimes. It is important to allow siblings have their feelings about each other heard. If one child says something negative about another one, don't dismiss their feelings by saying something like "you don't really mean that." Instead, try to validate and help them describe their feelings with a statement like "It sounds like your brother really hurt your feelings."



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## WHEN THEY FIGHT

Siblings will fight sometimes - it's inevitable.

- Normal bickering is OK to ignore. It is important to allow them to resolve smaller conflicts on their own.
- If it gets a little more heated, it can be helpful to intervene by reflecting each child's point of view
- If the situation is dangerous, describe what you see, reiterate rules, and separate - problem solve later

## NO ROLES

Make sure to not allow your children to be categorized into roles by yourself, their siblings, or anyone else. There is no "problem child" or "athletic child" or "smart child." Confining children into roles can harm their identity formation - it is important for children to know that they can become whatever and whoever they want, regardless of their siblings!

## PROBLEM SOLVING

After a difficult fight, problem solving is often necessary. When everyone is calm, call a meeting with the siblings. Establish ground rules, and allow each child to respectfully describe their feelings, allowing each child time to rebut. Once everyone has a full picture of what is going on, focus on discussing solutions, and find one that everyone can live with. Make sure everyone gets to suggest solutions if they want to. After resolved, check back in later.

## EQUAL IS NOT BEST

Every child has different needs, desires and abilities. This is why they shouldn't be treated as equals, they should be treated as unique individuals. They should be shown love and attention based on their needs at the time!



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