

[Controlling Sibling Rivalry](#)

Category : [August 1998](#)

Published by Anonymous on Aug. 02, 1998

PARENTING

Controlling Sibling Rivalry

Peaceful strategies for minor domestic warfare

What should I do when my children fight with each other?" This question opens the discussion on sibling rivalry in the outstanding book *Positive Discipline A-Z*, by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott and H. Stephen Glenn. They're well qualified to answer--Nelsen raised seven children, Lott and Glenn four apiece.

Sibling rivalry is normal. Parental overreaction is also normal, but actually leads to increased fighting. Children fight, the authors explain, out of jealousy, perceived hurt, lack of place in the family or to get even. To reduce fighting, parents must instill a special sense of significance and belonging for each child and teach them alternatives to fighting.

Surprisingly, the authors state if you perceive one child to be the underdog and try to protect him, it usually makes the situation worse. Treat children the same. Say, "You can both go to separate rooms until you are ready to stop fighting." Do this even if one is a baby. It may seem ridiculous to put an innocent baby in his room. But if you don't treat them equally, you will train one to be a victim and the other to be a bully.

Don't tell one, "You should know better! You're older!"

Sometimes you don't have to do anything. Hard as it may be, you can just let them fight until they work it out. You can say, "You can stop fighting, or else go outside to fight. If you choose to fight, I don't want to listen to it." Or instead of making them leave, you leave. Believe it or not, say these experienced parents and counselors, a major reason kids fight is to get you involved, to get you to take their side and blame and punish the other child. Real danger, of course, such as a "rock about to be launched," requires immediate intervention--but not spanking.

You can send both to a room and tell them to come out only when they have solved their problem. Or you can interrupt the fight and ask if they are willing to put the matter on the agenda for a family meeting. Then, in the calm atmosphere of the meeting, ask each to share his or her ideas on why kids fight and alternatives to fighting. Discuss all these ideas, and ask which alternatives they'd like to use next time they are fighting.

Avoid creating a competitive atmosphere in the home, for that is a root cause of sibling battles. Never compare children. You will encourage unhealthy competition, not improvement, by saying, "I know you can do as well as your sister!" Let the kids know how much you appreciate the special qualities that set them apart from other kids. Don't pick favorites. At family meetings and other activities, stress how great it is that we are all different and we each bring different skills and ideas to the family. A loving atmosphere of acceptance and cooperation is

the best hope for a fight-free family.

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ROCKLIN, CALIFORNIA 95677 USA