

# Helping Children in Your Family Get Along



**In a two-parent, single parent, blended or multi-generational family, children must learn to get along. One of the most important ways of learning about caring, sharing and give-and-take comes from the relationships within family structures. While most parents do not like it when children fuss and fight, it happens in all families. How parents help children solve problems is what matters most.**

## A New Baby

This experience may be difficult for a child who has enjoyed being the only one. There are often feelings of jealousy expressed by the older child with the birth of a baby. They may feel pushed aside, unwanted, unloved and very jealous of the time and attention the new baby or other children get. When bringing home a new baby, give them real expectations of a newborn, including eating, sleeping, crying and needing lots of diaper changes for the first few months. Involving them in preparing for the new baby is important while also acknowledging the frustration that will come with sharing parents. Be prepared for your older child to need lots of attention. They could regress to earlier behaviors such as wanting a bottle, bed wetting or thumb sucking. Helping them feel that they are still loved and cared for comes from your understanding and patience. Outward frustration like disappointment because parents are too busy with the new baby are likely and dealing with issues as they arise is important (ex: "It hurts my ears, too, to hear so much crying," or "I really wish I could hold you right now and read your favorite book."). Finding some time to devote to your older child when baby is sleeping or someone else is caring for the baby will be important.

## For a Single Parent

Being the only one to negotiate or enforce family rules can be overwhelming. It is important for you to create a stable and nurturing home. This stability provides the security that children need to feel safe and protected. These feelings of security and protection provide a much healthier base when

conflict arises in the household. Conflict is certain. Established and predictable routines provide a framework of expectations which helps alleviate some of the conflict that could arise. Developing a set of rules that encourages opportunities for family members to talk together as well as setting realistic goals as a family allows everyone to work together to accomplish tasks that have been identified as important.

## For Blended or Multi-Generational Families

These families can experience complex dynamics. While most children and family structures adapt well, some find it disrupting and hard to negotiate the network of new family relationships. For instance, conflict can arise when a child who was used to having their dad's attention finds it difficult to watch dad show interest and affection toward a step-brother or sister. Further, a grandparent may allow certain behaviors to take place that may not meet mom or dad's approval, which creates confusion and conflict between children.

## For Any Family Type, These Things Might Help When Children are Not Getting Along

- Spend some time with each child individually. Children need to know that parents see them as special. Comment on each child's unique characteristics and talents. Sometimes children fight because they need attention from parents or caregivers.
- Whenever possible, let children find their own solutions. If that doesn't work, suggest other solutions to try, such as, "Maybe you could take turns using the truck."
- When children are fighting and someone is going to get hurt, help by separating them until they have control of their feelings. Let them try again when they are ready to work it out with words.
- When you need to help them, do not take sides by deciding who is right and who is wrong. This may cause more fights.

- Parents and caregivers can show children how to get along by the way they get along with relatives, friends and each other.
- Remember, while conflicts between family members are bound to happen, with parent and other adult help, children can use these opportunities to learn important skills they will need throughout life to negotiate and compromise with others. If you would like to talk to someone about how to help children in your family get along better, call your county health department and ask to speak to a Child Guidance professional. Getting help is a sign of strength.

## Books For Parents

*Siblings Without Rivalry* by Faber and Mazlich

*He Hit Me First* by Ames and Ilg.

## Books For Children

*Me Too!* by Mercer Mayer Berenstain

*Bears' New Baby* by Stan and Jan Berenstain

*Nobody Asked Me If I Wanted A Baby Sister* by Martha Alexander

*When You Were A Baby* by Lewis and Lewis

*Max's New Baby* by Danielle Steele



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