

## Tips for Parents Part 5 Dealing with Sibling Rivalry and Arguments

Arguments between siblings is of course natural, especially during these times where they will be spending much more time with each other. Cries such as, "He's got a bigger burger than me... That's not fair... His piece is bigger than mine..." drive us mad. I remember my father using the technique, when sharing a Mars Bar (in the seventies): one child cuts it in half, the other child chooses which half. I remember my brother and I still managing to argue over this.



**Some good tips:**

### **1. Avoid labelling your children, especially when it makes comparisons.**

We should never talk about our children in terms of, "She's the athletic one... He's the smart one... He's the mathematician". Labelling children will most probably lead them away from exploring more interests and developing new skills in new areas through practice. In fact, the growth mindset model actively believes that anyone can get better at anything with the right practice and advice. So, by labelling children, we are automatically telling them that they might as well not try at certain things because either they are already "a mathematician" or will be no good at swimming because their sister "is the swimmer".

Labels can also dramatically increase the competition between siblings as we are making comparisons. When we refer to one child as the "athletic one" the other child automatically thinks "I'm not the athletic one" (so why even try) or when one child is a "good eater" the other assumes she must not be. If dad refers to you as the "smart one," I can only assume I'm (a lot) "less than smart."

Instead, focus on praising your children for positive traits such as kind and helpful behaviours. You then start to create a positive ethos and atmosphere where positive behaviours are recognised and children will want to demonstrate them more as they will get praise and attention for them.

### **2. Find time to spend with individual children.**

Your children will want to do different things which can make it a challenge for parents to spend enough time with each one. Try setting aside time to spend one to one with each child. Often, children may

argue in order to gain their parents' attention. This is a way of avoiding this. You may let them choose what you do together for 10-15 minutes.

### **3. Model the behaviours you want to see.**

If you know a situation is coming up which often causes arguments, use it to talk about beforehand. Model out the behaviours you don't want to see and make it funny. Explain that there will always be events which we don't think is fair. Life isn't 100% fair. That would be impossible. All we can do is try to make it as fair as possible. Explaining that we all need to accept this is important; moaning and whining will not be listened to and in fact ignored. Don't forget to use the tactical ignoring technique and tell your children, "I will listen to you when you are calm and respectful".

Remind children of taking turns and the words to use: "May I please play with..." and also give them language for responding ("I'm not quite finished playing with it, but I'll let you know when I'm finished.")

Discuss with your children when they really don't want to share certain things. I feel there are times when this is acceptable. Such as a special toy belonging to one child. We need things that are 'our's' and some things don't need to be shared.

Remind everyone that if they get frustrated and angry, walk away, find something to help their frustration out and return to discuss once they are calm.

### **4. Praise your child when they get it right.**

As soon as you see a child dealing with a situation fairly and kindly, point it out. In the classroom, this can be very powerful. Instead of focusing on a child doing the wrong thing, if the teacher focuses on the children doing the right thing and uses praise effectively, it can be very powerful. My team often used to joke that we needed a sick bucket in the corner as we showered children with praise!

More advice can be found here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/top-tips-for-handling-sibling-rivalry>