

## EveryDay Wisdom

-- Psychology You Can Use

### Sibling Rivalry Top 5 List

By Gretchen Harro, MA, LMFT

Top 5 things parents do to create sibling rivalry:

1. Compare children, especially when a judgment is included.  
Example: "Abbey is so easy. She sits right down after school to do her homework. Jeff is such a problem. I really have to lean on him to get his work done before bedtime."
2. Value one set of skills over another. Example: "Jen is such a good athlete! The kid's got stamina. She could play soccer all day. On the other hand, I can barely get Peter moving. All he wants to do is build his next great Lego contraption."
3. Create competitive situations, e.g. "Whoever finishes her homework first gets to go on the Internet first." "Whoever finishes his lunch first wins!"
4. Have a favorite child.
5. Create a good child/bad child dichotomy in which one child finds her place by being the good one and the other is put in the role of being the bad one. Children live up to our expectations. If we expect our child to be bad, she will live up to the expectation.

Top 5 things parents do to reduce sibling rivalry:

1. Speak to your children – or about your children – with an affirmation of their differences, not that one way is better than the other. "Abbey like to do her homework right after school to get it done and off her mind. Jeff prefers to take a break after school and generally starts his homework after dinner."
2. Value the unique talents and interests of each child. "I can see that you really enjoy creating things in art class."
3. Treat all the children in the family as a team. Example: "After the two of you get this room cleaned up you can play a game on the Xbox."

4. Be conscious of how much time and attention you give each child. It will never be exactly the same, but watch for significant differences. You may have a child that is easier for you to love and spend time with than the others. All the more reason to continue to reach out to the others.
5. Directly speak about your expectations of your children, e.g. "Our family has enough room for x good/loving/cooperative children." "X" of course being the total number of children in the family.

If these two Top Five lists have sparked some questions or if you'd like to talk to one of us about the rivalry in your home, please give us a call.

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