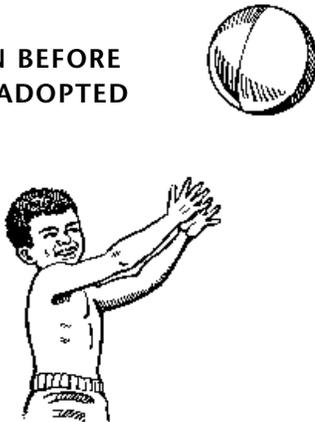


## Helping Siblings Get Along

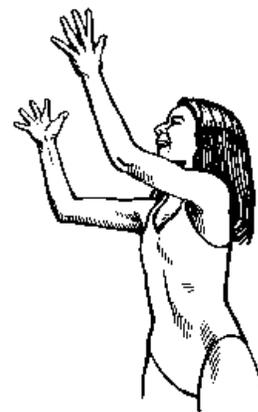
Getting along with a sibling can be tough. Children can feel jealous of the time, attention, and toys their siblings receive. Your children probably also compare themselves, whether they admit it or not. They do not necessarily take age into account when they decide that they have more chores than their sibling or are not as good at something as their sibling. You may be especially worried about how your children are getting along if you planned your family in hope that your children would be lifelong friends. Here are some ideas about what you can do to help your children get along well now and in the future.

### PREPARE YOUR CHILDREN BEFORE YOUR BABY IS BORN OR ADOPTED

- Tell your older children that you are going to have or adopt a baby early enough so that they do not find out first from someone else and feel that you were keeping it a secret.
- Explain why you are having or adopting a baby without making it your children's responsibility. For example, say "We really love children so we wanted another one," rather than, "We thought you would like a baby brother" (which will not be true every minute).
- Involve your children in preparing for the baby by picking out clothes, helping paint the nursery, and so on.
- Make sure your children know who will take care of them when you go to the hospital or birthing center or when you go to bring your adopted child home.
- Take your children to a sibling-preparation class at your local hospital if possible.
- Give your children a chance to see newborn infants and learn about what they can do (see, hear, feel, eat, sleep, cry) and cannot do (play, smile, crawl, walk, feed themselves).



### HELP YOUR CHILD ADJUST AFTER THE BABY COMES HOME



- Avoid having your older children hear any details about the birth or adoption that describe your pain or anxiety, which they may blame on the baby.
- Encourage but do not force your older children to hold or be photographed with the baby.
- Describe your new baby's needs and point of view to your older children to help them see the baby as a person.
- Provide opportunities for your older children to help care for the baby with close supervision, but do not require that they help.
- Praise any ways in which your older children help, make good observations about the baby, or are able to soothe or interest the baby.
- Show and say that you understand any angry feelings your older children have, but notice and limit aggressiveness promptly so that they know that you will protect the baby from their impulses.
- Be sure to spend at least 10 minutes of play time with each of your older children every day when

*(continued on next page)*

## Helping Siblings Get Along (continued)

the baby is asleep or being watched by someone else. Call it special time or give it another special name, and keep it uninterrupted so that your older children feel valued.

### HELP YOUR CHILDREN FEEL VALUED AS INDIVIDUALS AT EVERY AGE

- Keep your expectations for behavior, rules about household responsibilities, and privileges consistent with each child's age and level of maturity.
- Help your children see the advantages that come with age and development (e.g., more time with parents for younger siblings, more privileges and freedom for older children).
- Praise and comment on your children's individual strengths and skills.
- Avoid comparing your children.
- Spend special time with each of your children every day at every age (after age 10 do not call it special time any more, but do it anyway).

### DEAL WITH FIGHTS ACCORDING TO SEVERITY

- Avoid trying to decide who started a fight; usually all children involved have some responsibility. Giving a consequence for all the children involved will encourage them to avoid fights in the future.

- Ignore minor squabbles to avoid reinforcing this behavior with your attention.
- Listen to all sides of louder squabbles, then encourage your children to resolve the situation themselves.
- For intense fights, hear all sides, and then separate your children or take away the object they are fighting about.
- For physical fights, hear all sides, and then give time outs or consequences for each child.
- If one sibling repeatedly hurts another, consult your primary care health professional.

### BE PROACTIVE ABOUT BULLYING

- Do not allow one of your children to bully the others.
- Separate your children when bullying occurs.
- Recognize that close supervision of a child who chronically bullies may be needed.
- Arrange for your child to spend time with peers or siblings who can reinforce social skills by exhibiting positive behaviors.

### RESOURCE

Faber A, Mazlish E. 1998. *Siblings Without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too (10th Anniversary Edition)*. New York, NY: Avon Books.