



Texas Agricultural Extension Service
The Texas A&M University System

Parenting Young Children

Getting Along: Brothers and Sisters...

Learning to get along with others is one of the most important lessons that each of us learns. For most children their first opportunity for learning how to get along is with brothers and sisters. Family life offers a wonderful training ground for developing values of cooperation, honesty, kindness, and tolerance of others. Learning important social skills takes time. Living with brothers and sisters can give a child a lot of practice in learning how to share and resolve conflicts. And with the right kind of guidance from parents, it also can give children a lot of practice in learning how to be cooperative, supportive, and nurturing to others.

Parents Are Important Teachers

Parents are their children's most important teachers. It takes a lot of careful thought and patience to teach young children how to get along. But if a good foundation is laid early on, kids will become very capable at resolving their differences when they are older. If you do your job well in the early years, you will be able to stay more on the sidelines as your children grow and mature. The idea is to spend more time coaching kids than being a referee!

Children Need To Know How To...

- ◆ *say please and thank you*
- ◆ *share*
- ◆ *ask for help*
- ◆ *talk things over with others*
- ◆ *control their anger*
- ◆ *calm themselves*

Consider Age and Development

Infants love to watch older siblings. Toddlers enjoy playing alongside others and may try to imitate older children. But it is not until well into age three that children are really ready to play together in a cooperative way. Four and five year-olds dearly love to play with other children and are just learning basic lessons about taking turns and sharing. But learning to get along takes many weeks and months. Squabbles and tearful injuries can surface within seconds.

Think about the age of your child and use good judgement. Sometimes it is enough to just keep a watchful eye on children while busying yourself with other tasks. At other times you will need to be prepared to step in and take action. Always be alert for those special moments when you can teach children the skills they need to get along.

Establish A Few Basic Rules Early On

Let children know that it is **never** okay to physically hurt each other. The first time this happens, get down on their level, look them firmly in the eye and say "*It is **not** okay to hit your brother. We do not hurt people in our family. I **never** want to see you do that again.*" Then teach your child how to make amends by saying he or she is sorry. Making eye contact and saying your rule with absolute seriousness will convince most children that you mean what you say. Keep rules simple but clear, and repeat them frequently. Children learn from repetition and will soon learn to quote the rules in times of conflict. Emphasize the idea that these rules are *family* rules. Examples include:

- ◆ *No hitting, no hurting in our family*
- ◆ *We help others in our family*
- ◆ *In our family, we always ask to use something that belongs to someone else*
- ◆ *Ask if you need help*
- ◆ *Our family uses words to talk about problems*

Set The Stage For Good Behavior

Sometimes just the way you set up your home environment can encourage problems with children.

Ask yourself, “What about our home might make it hard for our children to get along?”

- ◆ *Are there things we can do to our home that will help prevent fights and squabbles?*
- ◆ *Are there places that encourage togetherness and cooperation?*
- ◆ *Are there places that allow for private time alone?*
- ◆ *Are there enough toys and activities that children of different ages can play with?*
- ◆ *Are there toys, videos, or computer games that encourage fighting?*
- ◆ *What can we do to help children understand that some places and things in our home are OK for sharing and some are not?*
- ◆ *Are there things that we can do that make our home more pleasant and peaceable?*

When Children Have Their Own Room

- ◆ Help each child make a “Please Knock” sign that can be posted on the door.
- ◆ Help children personalize their room with pictures and drawings.
- ◆ Hang a small bell outside the door that younger children can ring when they want to talk to an older brother or sister.

When Children Share A Room

- ◆ Make sure that each child has a shelf or small chest to store personal belongings.
- ◆ Make maximum use of closet space by installing extra shelves or closet organizers.
- ◆ Use masking tape for identifying personal spaces on floors, walls, and shelves.
- ◆ Try to find some comfortable, private place in your home that children can use when they need time alone.

In The Bathroom

- ◆ Give each child a colorful, plastic container in which he or she can store personal items.
- ◆ Buy each child his or her own color of wash cloth and towel.
- ◆ Buy each child his or her own tube of toothpaste.
- ◆ Purchase a toilet paper dispenser that holds several rolls at once.
- ◆ Use a timer to limit bathroom dawdlers.

In The Kitchen

- ◆ Post a list of chores on the refrigerator. For young children, use pictures or photos instead of words.
- ◆ Create a communication center in which the family can leave notes and instructions.
- ◆ Showcase children’s artwork or school papers on the refrigerator.

- ◆ Use clear acrylic photo magnets on the refrigerator of your children playing and working together.

In The Living Room

- ◆ Display pictures of individual children and of brothers and sisters playing, and working together cooperatively.
- ◆ Keep a sturdy family photo album in an easy-to-get-to place. Family pictures give children an important sense of belonging and strong sense of history.
- ◆ Create a cozy place for family discussions.

In Play Areas

- ◆ Select toys and activities that children of different ages can enjoy together. Blocks, dress-up clothes, play dough, puppets, and art supplies such as paper, paint, glue, and stickers are good choices.
- ◆ Remove toys, books, videos, and computer games that encourage fighting or violent behavior.
- ◆ Color code toys to help young children understand what is personal and what is to be shared. Permanent felt tip markers or colored electrical tape are ideal for this.
- ◆ Make it easy to find and pick up toys by storing them on low shelves and in clear plastic containers rather than in a toy box.
- ◆ Color code shelves so that older children understand that small, breakable items that are dangerous for younger siblings need to be stored up high, out of reach.
- ◆ A small rug or blanket can be used by each child to create a special place to play on his or her own. When play is over, the rug can be rolled up or slipped under a sofa for easy storage.
- ◆ Buy two of inexpensive but favorite items.

All Around The House

- ◆ Arrange furniture so that running and wild horse play are held to a minimum. Block off wide open spaces with a well-placed sofa. Move the chest that is always getting hit by the back door when the kids come tramping in from the back yard.
- ◆ Avoid a crisis by keeping things that are breakable, valuable, or dangerous out of reach.
- ◆ Music often soothes the souls of wild beasts. Keep some pleasant, cheerful music close to a tape player when tempers begin to flare.
- ◆ Make your home a comfortable, peaceable place that appeals to all the senses. A few plants and some wall paint can work wonders.

Tips From Experienced Parents

Start Young...From the very beginning let children know that they are expected to treat each other fairly. Let your kids know that hurting each other is **not** okay.

Take 30 Seconds To Stop, Look and Listen...This definitely helps you get a better idea of what kids are fighting over. Take the next 30 seconds to think about how you should respond to the situation. Thirty seconds doesn't seem like very long, but you will be amazed at how it helps you to keep your cool and take charge in an effective way.

It Is OK To Treat Children Differently...The important thing is not to devalue one child over the other. Focus on the positives of each child's personality and interests.

Think Cooperation Instead Of Competition...For example, rather than having children race each other to pick up toys, set a timer and have them race together to beat the clock. Try to find at least one thing every day that kids can work together to accomplish.

Look For Opportunities For Children To Help Each Other... Even very young children can bring diapers, help feed the baby, cuddle a younger one who is upset, or push the stroller.

Make At Least One Weekly Chore A Team Effort...Setting the table, feeding the birds, emptying the dishwasher, and raking leaves are good jobs for learning how to work together.

Help Children To Problem Solve...Take the time to help them discuss the problem, brainstorm solutions, and try to work things out. The time you invest early on will save a great deal of time years later because they will become so good at it, they will be able to solve most problems themselves.

Remember That You Are On Stage — A Real-Life Stage...Your kids watch what you do very closely. Show your children how to be patient with each other by talking in a calm voice, giving clear directions, and avoiding angry comments.

Teach Your Children What To Do When They Are Angry...Walk away from the situation, count to ten, go hug a stuffed animal, or ask an adult for help.

Remember To Thank Your Children For Getting Along... *"It's great to see you two working together to rake leaves" or "Thanks for helping your sister pick up her toys".*

Remember Also To Remind Your Children To Thank Each Other... *"I bet Megan would feel good if she heard a thank you for helping you set the table."*

Have Regular Rules And Routines So Children Know What To Expect...Children should know that they are always expected to clean up their toys before bedtime or feed the pet right before dinner. If parents are consistent, kids have a better idea about what is needed from them in everyday family life.

Consult With Children...When older children continue to fight, sit down with them and ask their advice. Sometimes

kids can come up with very good suggestions for resolving a persistent problem.

Develop a Family Motto Or Slogan...Hearing a family motto helps small children feel the security of belonging to a strong family. Say your motto during everyday routine times such as eating dinner, and say it to children when conflict arises. Sample mottos:

- ◆ *The Jones family is a peaceable family.* ◆ *Caring and respect for each and every one.*
- ◆ *Family and friends — together we can.* ◆ *Honesty and fairness for all.*

Books For Children About Siblings

One of the best teaching tools for families are children's books. Check your local library for the following family favorites:

A Baby for Max by Maxwell Knight
A Baby Sister For Frances by Russell Hoban
Baby Sister Says No by Mercer Mayer
Big Brother by Charlotte Zolotow
Big Sister, Little Sister by Charlotte Zolotow
Do You Know What I'll Do by Charlotte Zolotow
Go and Hush the Baby by Betsy Byars
I Love My Baby Sister (Most of the Time) by Elaine Edelman
Just Me and My Little Brother by Mercer Mayer

Just Me and My Little Sister by Mercer Mayer
Me Too! By Mercer Mayer
Nobody Asked If I Wanted A Baby Sister
by Martha Alexander
On Mother's Lap by Ann Herbert Scott
Peter's Chair by Ezra Jack Keats
That New Baby by Sara Bonnett Stein
The New Baby by Fred Rogers
Let Me Tell You About My Baby by Roslyn Banish
Walk Home Tired, Billy Jenkins by Lanthe Thomas

References

- Kids Can Cooperate*, Elizabeth Crary, Parenting Press, 1984.
 - Perilous Rivalry: When Siblings Become Abusive*, Vernon Wiehe, McMillan, 1991.
 - Siblings Without Rivalry*, Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish, W.W. Norton, 1987.
-

Written by Lesia Oesterreich
Family Life Specialist
ISU Extension, Iowa State University



***For more information on parenting
or if your organization would like
a parenting program contact —***



Nancy A. Brown, County Extension Agent
Family & Consumer Sciences
Denton County Government Center
306 N. Loop 288, Suite 222
Denton, TX 76201-4818
(940) 565-5537 ◆ METRO (972) 434-2052
FAX (940) 565-5621 ◆ nbrown@tamu.edu

This newsletter is public information and may be reproduced and distributed but you must keep the

reference to Texas Agricultural Extension Service. The number reproduced and distributed must be reported to Nancy A. Brown, County Extension Agent in Family & Consumer Sciences by either telephone or in writing at address or telephone numbers.

This newsletter has been compiled and distributed to enrich and improve the lives of Denton County residents by

Nancy A. Brown, County Extension Agent
Family and Consumer Sciences
Mary Campbell, FCS Administrative Assistant &
Design Editor