

Raising Siblings Who Stick Together



Being a sibling shapes us in important ways. These early connections can be a source of support and fun throughout our entire lives. Here is what you can do to help your child build these early bonds.

Avoid favorites and labels. Try not to compare children. When one child is compared to another in a not-so-good way, it can make it hard to build sibling relationships. Labels can hurt too, like calling one child "the smart one" or "the wild one." Kids start to believe what we say about them. Even positive labels invite comparisons and hurt feelings. Appreciate each child for their unique strengths.

Build strong relationships with each child. If you can, have some one-on-one time with each child. This helps all siblings feel loved and special.

Expect different things at different ages. Treating your children the same is not always fair. A toddler and a 7-year-old need different things. That is not playing favorites. It is meeting each child where they are. You can explain this to older children when they say, "That's not fair!"

Help children learn to manage conflicts. These moments help children learn to manage peer disagreements. They also help children imagine another person's feelings. Let your children try to work it out. Step in when they need help. Remember that hitting, name-calling, or other hurtful behavior is still not okay, even if it is from a sibling. When you step in, help both kids name their feelings. *"You were really mad when she took your toy."* *"You wanted a turn too."*

Repair after the argument. After a fight, help your children make repairs. They can say sorry, give a hug, or try a do-over. Repair is more important than the argument itself. It teaches your kids that even when things go wrong, the relationship can be fixed.



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Have fun as a family. Make time for siblings to enjoy one another.

- A dance party, blocks, art, cooking, and outdoor play are great for children of different ages.
- Give them a team challenge: *"Can you two carry the laundry basket over to the washing machine? Let's see how strong you are together!"*

Cheer each other on. Encourage siblings to support one another. Take them to each other's games and activities, and talk about one to the other in a kind way.

Let siblings care for one another. If a child is sick, let their brother bring them a snack. If a child falls down at the park, ask their sister to help them up.

Watch how you handle your own relationships. Your kids are watching how you treat your partner, your parents, and your own siblings. They learn how to be in a relationship by watching you. Try to model kindness, listening, and repair when things get hard.

Ask for more help if you need it. Sibling fights are normal. But if one child is being mean or hurting another over and over, that is a pattern that needs attention. Talk to an expert who knows your family. A school counselor or healthcare provider can help you figure out what to do.

While sibling arguments are normal, sibling connections are too. Nurturing these early relationships is a lifelong gift you give your children.

Have more questions? Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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