

peptalk

Parenting Education

Practitioners Talk

Ideas and Information for Parenting Practitioners

When Siblings Continue to be Rivals

by Linda Carlson

Sibling rivalry is an important issue with many parents when kids are young—but what happens when children grow up?

If brothers and sisters stay rivals after they become parents, how does that affect family dynamics? And what help can parent educators offer? Those are two of the questions *PEP Talk* posed to parent educators. In response, they identified such issues as:

- Discipline
- Family style
- Judgmental comments
- Favored grandchildren
- Siblings forced apart by kids

Discipline

What happens when one branch of the family is convinced that another branch lets its children run wild? Or when one set of cousins get blamed for introducing others to bad language and bad behavior? Unpleasant family gatherings, for a start.

There are few things worse at a holiday dinner than the sister or brother who snipes, “If you didn’t spoil them so badly . . .” Unless, of course, it’s a child who *does* race through crowded rooms, jump on furniture, pester the pets or insult the hostess.

If you work with families who suffer with ill-mannered young guests, Lee Ann Slaton of San Francisco suggests that children be reminded that every family has different rules. Adds Mary Kay Stranik of Minneapolis: Young guests can be briefed about what is acceptable behavior in the home they are visiting, by parent or, if necessary, by the hosts. Children *can* learn more than one set of rules. Especially when the setting differs, it can cue children to appropriate behavior for that environment, she explains.

Similarly, children who visit undisciplined cousins can be reminded that certain freedoms *only*

occur at Aunt Sally’s. You also may find yourself limiting how many times your children see these cousins. Avoidance rather than resolution, as one parenting educator sighed.

If the extended family is together often, Slaton says you’ve got to talk about the issue and get family members to agree to an accommodation acceptable to everyone. To do so, therapist and author Eileen Kennedy-Moore of Westfield, New Jersey suggests respectful comments about specific issues rather than sweeping, judgmental accusations. “We have different rules about TV. How shall we handle it when we’re together?” opens the door for communication and compromise, she says.

As for how families can handle sniping, whether justified or not, Martha S. Flemming of Solon, Ohio recommends deflating the sibling’s complaint by agreeing. “You’re probably right, I do tend to spoil my kids a little bit.”

Of course, parents need to speak up when there’s a serious issue. Explain what is unacceptable and what you would like relatives to do, says Kennedy-Moore: “It’s not okay for you to hit my kids. If you have a problem with their behavior, tell me so that I can handle it.”

When family style differs

New parents are often especially vulnerable to criticism and have difficulty taking in stride comments on such issues as the family bed, breast feeding and working mothers. Try to empower new parents, suggests Slaton; tell them to trust their instincts.

The problem is aggravated when some siblings mirror their parents’ child-guidance style and other siblings choose to parent differently. Brothers and sisters may have grown up in the same family, but some reject their parents’ style outright, notes Rose Kor of Prevent Child Abuse

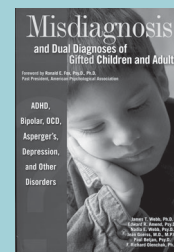
Issue 28 ▲ Spring 2005

Book Review

Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, Bipolar, OCD, Asperger’s, Depression, and Other Disorders

by James T. Webb et al

Scottsdale: Great Potential Press, Inc., 2005. 304 pp. \$19.95



Written by six practicing clinical health care professionals, this book identifies three situations that sometimes face bright children, bright adults and their families:

- They are misdiagnosed as having behavioral, emotional or mental disorders and are medicated, counseled and stigmatized unnecessarily;
- They have disorders which go undiagnosed because they are able to conceal or compensate for their problems; or
- They have disorders but no one realizes that their treatment needs to acknowledge and accommodate the individuals’ brightness or creativity.

The authors start by saying this book describes a modern tragedy. Nothing could be more accurate. Chapter by chapter, they detail how misinformation, misunderstanding and a lack of tolerance result in kids (and adults) being labeled with one, two or several disorders. The very intense and energetic child may be misdiagnosed as ADHD, the sensually overexcitable child as autistic. As bad, some problems that *are* more common among gifted children and adults result in misdiagnosis or medication when the best solution is probably a change in the home, school or workplace environment.

For parents and those who work with children, this book defines giftedness and its incidence. It provides a straightforward explanation of personality characteristics common to high potential (but not necessarily high performing) individuals. It describes why family members, friends, teachers, employers and others may have difficulty accepting these traits as normal. It alerts readers to giftedness as a cause of so-called unconventional behavior and provides information that can be used when consulting doctors, counselors and educators and when advocating for a child or one’s self.

by Linda Carlson

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

What's on Your Mind?

Do you have thoughts to share with other parenting practitioners? If so, send them to: **What's on Your Mind, PEP Talk, P.O. Box 75267, Seattle, WA 98125** or e-mail to office@ParentingPress.com.

Focus on children in racial and ethnic minority immigrant families

"A demographic transformation which is unprecedented in American history and which is remaking our social and political landscape," is how Donald J. Hernandez, professor of sociology at the State University at Albany, University of New York, describes the changes in both minorities and immigrants. The racial and ethnic groups that were minorities are becoming the majority, he says, and that change is creating a myriad of demands on the agencies and programs that serve children and families. Here are some of his points:

Most future population growth in the U.S. will occur through immigration and through births to immigrants and their descendants. Because most children in immigrant families are Hispanic or nonwhite, the Census Bureau projects that 50 per cent of the child population will identify themselves as Hispanic, black, Asian or another racial minority in as little as 30 years. That's up from 31 per cent in 1990.

By 2030, the youngest of the baby boomers will have reached retirement age. Of all Americans past working age by that time, 74 per cent will be white, non-Hispanic—compared to 59 per cent of the working-age adults and 52 per cent of those younger than 18. This means that a predominantly white retiree population will depend for its economic support on the productivity and the votes of racial and ethnic minorities, many of whom will have come from immigrant families.

To ensure that these future workers are healthy, productive and successful during adulthood, it is critical that we direct increasing attention to their circumstances and needs. There are three major factors that place today's very young, those between birth and age 3, at risk.

- **Linguistic isolation.** Many families speak a language other than English at home, and many young children are in linguistically isolated households where no one older than 13 speaks English very well. These children may have substantial difficulty communicating with and learning from early educators. They may also experience barriers when their families try to communicate with health and social service agencies that are not prepared to function in a variety of languages.

- **Limited education.** When parents have limited education, they may have difficulty interacting with school, health and social service agencies that do or could provide services to their children. In general, when parents have limited education, kids tend to have limited success in school and work. Most newcomer families with limited education come from four parts of the world: Indochina, the Dominican Republic/Haiti, Central America and Mexico, and the Middle East. About one third of the mothers from Central America and Mexico have completed no more than eight years of school.

- **Poverty.** Among those families born in the U.S., whites and Asians are the least likely to be poor or what is considered 'near' poor, about 20 per cent. For Hispanics, that figure jumps to 42 per cent, for American Indians to 49 per cent, and for blacks, 53 per cent. Of newcomer families overall, about 37 per cent are poor or 'near' poor. The incidence of poverty is especially common when mothers are not well educated and when families suffer with linguistic isolation: as high as 54 per cent among newcomers from Mexico.

What does this mean for professionals or parents focused on children from birth to age 3? We need to think about how we will provide for the needs of children who are racial or ethnic minorities or growing up in immigrant families. Today they account for at least a quarter of *all* children in 31 states—and more than a half of the children in five states.

Dr. Hernandez can be contacted at DonH@albany.edu.

Conferences

May 6-7, "Early Literacy in a Changing World," Portland, Maine. Contact: (866) 637-3233, brita@mainehumanities.org.

May 9-14, National Education Conference, National Foster Parent Association, Garden Grove, California. Contact: (800) 557-5238, events@NFPAinc.org.

May 13-14, "Children: Our Link to the Future," MassAEYC Conference, Westford. Contact: Marcia Farris, (617) 522-0881, office@baeyc.org.

May 17-20, World Forum on Early Care and Education, Montreal. Contact: (800) 221-2864, info@childcareexchange.com.

May 20-21, "Parent Education at the Crossroads: Charting Our Course," St. Paul, Minnesota. Contact: (651) 407-0950, allen027@umn.edu.

May 24-27, Head Start Training Conference, Orlando. Contact: (703) 739-0875, www.nhsa.org

Purpose:

To provide parent support and education practitioners with information and ideas

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Presentation Plan

Total Time: 58 minutes

Self-Calming Strategies for Kids

Objectives

Participants will learn:

- To help their children identify feelings
- Techniques for self-calming

Materials and preparation

Whiteboard or easel with large pad and markers

Handout for each participant

Paper and pencil for each participant

Optional: timer

Optional: decks of the *Self-Calming Cards*

Background for educator

With the publicity surrounding emotional literacy, many parents now work hard to help their children identify feelings. But acknowledging feelings isn't enough: kids also need coping strategies. By practicing how to soothe themselves when angry, frustrated or anxious, children learn techniques that will be important throughout life. The emotionally literate child is also more likely to be successful in school, at work, and in interpersonal relationships. Emotional literacy helps safeguard children from such problems as drug and alcohol addiction, eating disorders, aggressive behavior and depression.

Introduce topic (1 minute)

Say, "In this session we're going to talk about emotions and how we can handle them. Since the publication of several books on emotional literacy and the concept of an 'EQ' (emotion quotient) as well as an 'IQ,' we've learned about the importance of describing our feelings. What we all need to know is how to cope with our emotions: how to calm ourselves when we're angry, anxious, frustrated or overwhelmed with excitement. In this class, I'm going to introduce six different kinds of self-calming strategies so that you can sample them and decide which ones are appropriate for your family now and which ones to try later."

Small group activity (8 minutes)

Ask each participant to select a partner. Each pair should list as many emotions as it can in one minute. (Optional: use timer.) Reassemble the

group; as volunteers read their lists, jot emotions on board. Now ask, "What do you notice about the emotions that you thought of first?"

Mini-lecture (1 minute)

"That's right, many of the emotions we've mentioned could be called negative, or uncomfortable. That's especially true when we think about the emotions our children demonstrate. When we pay more attention to a certain emotion, we see more of it: in other words, if we react more quickly when our children are frustrated than when they are contented, they are going to demonstrate more frustration.

"Most of us don't like being angry or anxious or disappointed for any length of time; these are the kinds of emotions that keep us from sleeping at night and give us stomachaches. They make it hard to think clearly, be productive or get along with other people. It's easier to get things done when we're calm, when we feel something pleasant and mild. So one important technique for coping with strong emotions is to learn how to calm ourselves.

Large group exercise (15 minutes)

"On your handout, under *6 Kinds of Self-calming Techniques*, are listed categories of self-calming tools: physical, auditory/verbal, visual, creative, self-nurturing and humor. (Write each category on the board or a different sheet of paper.) I'd like you to give me examples of activities in each category. You can add these or others you think of to your handout. (Write down three examples under each heading before moving to next category.)

"Now, let's see how our families can use some of these tools. Will one of you will describe a situation that makes a child angry or frustrated? Then we'll discuss which kinds of self-calming tools might work well. (If no one volunteers, suggest a situation such as a child being upset because he was excluded from a playground game.)

Mini-lecture (2 minutes)

"Calming ourselves is much easier when we have a repertoire of self-soothing techniques that we've

The presentation plans are designed to help you present new or classic material. Each plan includes activities and discussion questions to help make the material relevant to parents.

Adapt this material to suit your groups.

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practiced. This is especially true for children. If the calming techniques are unfamiliar or are difficult for the child to do, you can expect anger and frustration to increase rather than decrease. So it's important to introduce calming techniques and practice them when both you and your child are calm. Here are some ways you can introduce the concept of self-calming to your children:

- Ask your children to think of what made them feel better the last time they were anxious or frustrated.
- Make a list of different kinds of calming activities, referring to your notes from our last exercise or to the *Self-Calming Cards*, and ask your children which activities each child would like to try.
- Model calming activities for your children.
- Link self-calming activities to a recent difficult situation. 'Remember when you and Martin squabbled this morning? What could you have done to calm yourself then?'
- Talk to your children about which activities they would prefer to use when they're angry and which ones to try when they're disappointed or scared.

"To help your children learn self-calming skills:

- Have your children each select three activities when they are calm and see which activity makes each child feel better at that time.
- Demonstrate an activity (making a silly face to break tension, for example).
- Practice one of the more complicated activities such as making bread with your children when you are all relaxed.
- Role-play the tool. For example, say, 'Let's pretend I've just had an argument with my best friend. I'm so angry! So I say that I'm going to read a while until I calm down and can decide what to do next.'

Small group exercise (15 minutes)

Divide your class into pairs, one role-playing the adult, the other the child. The adult should introduce the concept of self-calming and demonstrate a calming technique to the child, assuming that the child is a preschooler. Then the partners should switch roles and repeat the exercise, selecting a new technique and assuming the child is 6 or 7. Finally, have partners switch roles again, and introduce another technique, assuming the child is a middle-schooler.

Mini-lecture (1 minute)

"Once you and your children have practiced self-calming techniques, you are better prepared to recall

them in an upsetting situation. But what do you as the adult do first when you realize a child is having difficulty coping?

"First, you ensure the safety of people and things. When kids are upset, it's rarely a crisis, although it often feels that way. When you're assured that everyone and everything is safe, you acknowledge your child's feeling: 'It's okay to be angry.'

"Next, set limits. 'It's okay to be angry, and I will not let you kick the dog.'

"Then offer choices. 'You know several ways to calm yourself down. Would you like to go outside and stomp up and down or would you like to take a bath?'

"Finally, offer support. 'Would you like me to count how many times you can jump up and down in a minute?'"

Large group exercise (8 minutes)

Say, "Thinking about your family, what would be effective ways to remind your children (and yourself and your partner, if necessary) of self-calming strategies?"

"Keeping a set of the *Self-Calming Cards* in a convenient location is one way to have self-soothing ideas ready. Whether or not you're using the cards, how can you encourage your family to try self-calming techniques when someone's upset?"

"Let's suppose you've checked that everyone and everything is safe, and that you've set limits. Now, how do you offer choices?" (If class members are hesitant to volunteer ideas, suggest drawing one of the *Self-Calming Cards* or drawing from a stack of index cards on which you've written your own self-calming strategies.)

Small group exercise (5 minutes)

Now divide your class into pairs again to role-play parent and child. Each child should express an intense emotion such as excitement, frustration or sadness. The parent will offer two appropriate self-calming strategies. Parents should be prepared to re-introduce the technique if children are not initially responsive.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Reconvening your group, ask what parents found challenging about trying the self-calming tools. Typical issues are parents not setting aside time to introduce the self-calming concept; remembering to practice self-calming techniques between crises; and children being reluctant to discuss the topic or practice the techniques.



Self-Calming Strategies for Kids

6 Kinds of Self-Calming Techniques

<p>Physical</p> <p><i>Example: Hold yourself together.</i></p>	<p>Creative</p> <p><i>Example: Make a craft.</i></p>
<p>Auditory/Verbal</p> <p><i>Example: Listen to music.</i></p>	<p>Self-nurturing</p> <p><i>Example: Take a warm bath.</i></p>
<p>Visual</p> <p><i>Example: Watch an aquarium.</i></p>	<p>Humor</p> <p><i>Example: Make a silly face.</i></p>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

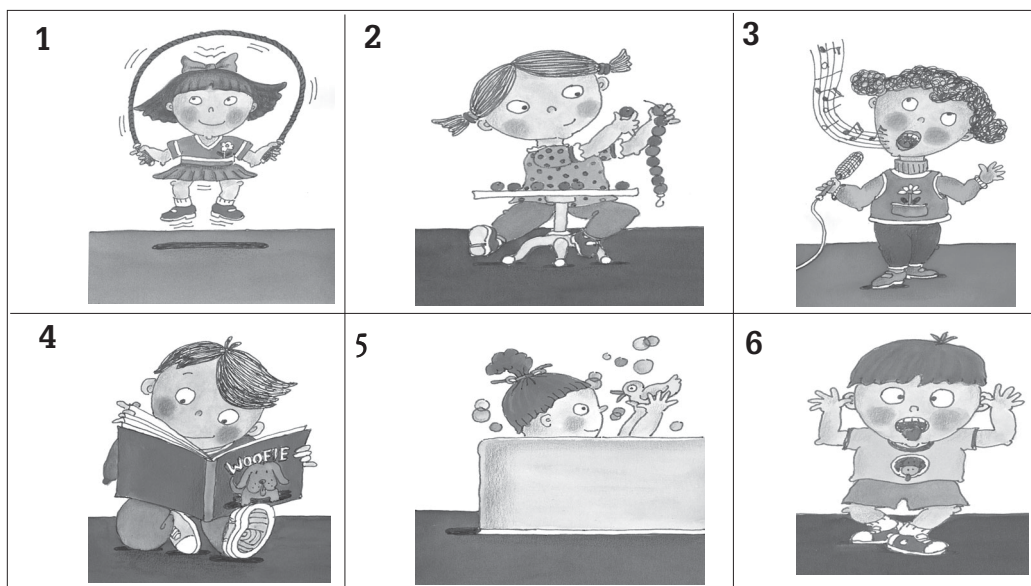
Elizabeth Crary, M.S., is the author of nearly three dozen publications for parents and children, including *Dealing with Disappointment* and the *Self-Calming Cards*. They and Ms. Crary's recent speeches and parent education workshops on coping strategies served as the basis for this teaching plan.

How to Teach Self-Calming Techniques

1. Explain the technique.
2. Model the technique.
3. Use publications such as the *Self-Calming Cards* and the "Dealing with Feelings" series to show other children use these techniques.
4. Role-play the techniques.
5. Ask your child to practice the technique when everyone is calm.
6. Play games such as "Simon Says" or "Self-Calming Bingo" (below) to reinforce the self-calming skills.
6. Ask your child how using a technique changes how he feels.

Self-Calming Bingo

Roll a die and demonstrate the self-calming technique indicated on that number's space.



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Helping bright kids who are poor, underachieving or not fitting in

How can you advise the parents of bright kids, their teachers—or the kids themselves? A new book includes several thoughtful research reports.

Nurturing gifted, low-income kids

Children identified as high achieving tend to come from homes that are rich in resources—money, parental time, psychological and educational resources. Parents' attitudes about education also is a significant factor in children's academic achievement.

But, as "Family Factors Associated with High Academic Competence in Former Head Start Children at Third Grade" points out, finances is not the most important variable. Robinson, Lanzi, Weinberg, S. Ramey and C. Ramey, working with high-achieving children selected from a national Head Start demonstration project, concluded that bright kids' caretakers had more positive parenting attitudes and were perceived by teachers to more strongly encourage academic achievement. Despite the fact that 20 per cent of the families were on public assistance and that nearly a third had uninvolved fathers, the summary notes, "Even families sorely stressed by life circumstances can support very positive intellectual and social competence in their children."

What is troubling to the authors, however, is that although teachers rated these high-achieving children as significantly more socially competent, more motivated to succeed, better behaved and more advanced academically, the teacher ratings of achievement were far lower than the children's actual achievement as measured by nationally standardized exams.

"There is considerable concern that high-ability children who come from families of limited means and marginal social status may be overlooked by school personnel."

Mentoring underachieving boys

Gifted young men are believed to be at special risk for developing such problems as: academic and behavioral problems, self-identify and self-esteem issues, and denial of talent.

In "Mentors for Gifted Underachieving Males: Developing Potential and Realizing Promise," Hebert and Olenchak point out that some subgroups of gifted students are unlikely to attract mentors on their own. Underachievers are among these groups. So are disadvantaged or minority youth, because they are often less likely to reflect

socioeconomic characteristics similar to those of potential mentors.

What the authors recommend is that schools strive to match appropriate men with underachieving boys. The goal is not to supplant family members. However, boys accustomed to underachieving need to meet men who are passionate about sharing their own strengths and interests with boys, men who are committed to serving as spokesmen, advocates and confidantes.

Does acceleration hurt kids?

Accelerating bright kids continues to be a controversial practice. Many parents and educators fear that the child who starts early or skips a grade or two will not do well socially or emotionally.

In "Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Adjustment of Accelerated Students, Students in Gifted Classes, and Regular Students in Eighth Grade," Saylor and Brookshire discuss approximately 1,000 children, of whom 365 had either started school early or skipped at least one grade. All geographic areas of the U.S., income incomes, ethnic groups, rural and urban schools and public and private schools were sampled. Their observation: that the kids in accelerated classes and gifted programs did better than "regular" students. They felt good about their social and emotional adjustment and they were better behaved.

When bright kids are unpopular

Most research on peer relations of high potential children has focussed on refuting the stereotype that bright kids are social misfits. As the above reviews point out, the stereotype is nothing more than that. However, there are intellectually gifted children who *do* have difficulty with classmates. In "High Ability Students Who Are Unpopular with Their Peers," Cornell discusses possible reasons.

It is usually not clear whether unpopularity is due to the child's personality and behavior or to prejudicial attitudes in the classroom or school. Nor has much research identified why some bright kids are popular and others are not.

Cornell studied only children participating in a two-week university-based summer enrichment program, which dramatically limited the diversity of his subjects and the length of time the children interacted with each other. The cost of these programs may be one reason that Cornell found fathers' occupational status to be a significant factor in kids' popularity.

The most consistent group differences, however, emerged in the teacher ratings. Based on these ratings, unpopular students were characterized as lacking in initiative, especially when working independently, making decisions and undertaking new tasks. Teacher ratings also led to the conclusions that unpopular kids may:

- demonstrate excessive needs for social attention by not being appropriately quiet in class or not cooperating with others;
- be intolerant of failure and overreact to criticism;
- avoid leadership roles with their peers; and
- not refer to themselves in positive terms.

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by Linda Carlson

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Wyoming. In other cases, siblings actually may have been parented differently due to birth order or family situation at the time of their childhood. The situation may also be almost intolerable if there is only family member who does things differently; it's tough to be one against a crowd.

If your clients only see other family members a few times a year, parent educators agree that it may be best to say a polite "Thank you, I appreciate your concern" for the advice and then have parents do whatever they prefer. But do consider the validity of the suggestions, says Flemming: the recommendations may be worthwhile.

Judgmental comments

The unfortunate reality is that some families are very judgmental. Joan Barbuto of Wallingford, Connecticut, suggests that adults, both grandparents and their adult children, agree to avoid derogatory language about differing parenting styles. As several other parent educators noted, different is not necessarily worse. And wouldn't sameness be boring?

How can a family end what it perceives as judgmental comments? Here's how D'Arle Mezzacapo, a Colorado parent educator, handled it with her own family: when she and four siblings and their families gathered for a reunion, she wore a shirt that proclaimed, "You have the right to remain silent, anything you say will be misquoted and used against you." Once everyone had arrived, she also declared, "Now, remember, for everyone to have a good time, we can't talk about religion, money, politics—or child rearing!"

Favored grandchildren

Friction over how children are grandparented is another issue that parent educators report. Some parents believe that grandparents do more for the kids who live nearby or the kids who are more accomplished. Those parents who as children were the centers of attention (perhaps because they were the youngest children) may be surprised when they—and their children—are no longer the stars. Similarly, those who always struggled for attention when they were children may be even more determined to have their children be the most important to the grandparents.

Then there are the concerns resulting from nontraditional families. What is equitable when

there are both natural and step-grandchildren, especially when the step-grandchildren also have relationships with their natural grandparents? Incorporating these children into a new blended, extended family may be difficult if the children are unhappy about the remarriage of one or both parents and are demonstrating this resentment through their behavior.

Similarly, siblings who are rearing their own children often complain about their kids being shortchanged by the grandparents who have taken custody of other siblings' children. Kids who live with their grandparents may feel that they are treated differently by the grandparents than their cousins are.

How can parents handle some of these situations? Grandparents blind to their favoritism need a cue, says Flemming. "My daughter feels a little left out when you only talk about Cousin Billy," is a gentle reminder, she notes. And try the same kind of reinforcement used with kids: "It really meant a lot to Susie when you praised her. Compliments from you have such powerful impact on my kids, it makes them want to accomplish even more."

As for the aunts and uncles who are always maneuvering their kids into the limelight at the expense of cousins, Kennedy-Moore recommends refusing to compete in the oneupsmanship. If your children ask why you don't brag about them, explain, "I already know you're wonderful. I don't need other people to tell me so," she suggests.

Mary Stubler of the Family Life Department in the Diocese of Green Bay (Wisconsin) advocates tolerance on the part of the adults. "Accepting that this behavior is just part of Aunt Patty buries the

problem but it may be the only possible way to participate in family functions."

As your children mature, you can discuss the possible reasons for the hurtful behavior in terms of that relative's need, she adds.

"Maybe it's caused by Aunt Patty's lack of self-esteem rather than your cousins' choice to exclude you."

To young children, Stubler recommends that you emphasize how many other family members love them and how it would be mean to cause a scene at a gathering just because Aunt Patty or one

of her children is unkind. After an event where your child has been snubbed, you can talk about how Aunt Patty or her children have missed out, how they have passed up the opportunity to get to know your child better.

Siblings forced apart by kids

Some brothers and sisters are real buddies, as children and into young adulthood. Some grow apart because of kids—because those who can't have children are jealous of those who do, because the cousins are far apart in age, or because the cousins don't get along.

Recognize, says Flemming, that you were siblings before the kids were born and you'll still be siblings when you're empty nesters. To stay connected while you are parenting, she suggests occasional adults-only events. "Don't let the children dictate your own relationships and closeness to others," Flemming adds. "That gives the kids way too much power."

Reducing adult sibling squabbles

How can adult sibling rivalry be reduced? Here's additional suggestions from several parent educators and counselors:

- Acknowledge that most people won't change. Look at criticism as silly remarks rather than deliberate attempts to hurt you.
- Give in on trivial issues.
- Cite authorities such as a doctor when your parenting is questioned.
- Make sure you aren't contributing to the problem. Are you unintentionally supporting a sibling's unpleasant behavior? Stay focused on the current issue and avoid ancient family history.
- Reduce contact. If necessary, get involved in activities that create schedule conflicts with some extended family events.
- Find ways to socialize that are less stressful. Some adult siblings get along better in a group, where there are more people to diffuse tension. Casual potlucks or structured activities (pick-up baseball games, concerts) may work better than crowded holiday gatherings. So may quick sibling-only coffee breaks.
- Treat siblings with the same courtesy you extend to friends: Call before dropping in. Don't offer advice unless you're asked. Be free with compliments; avoid criticism. Be interested in their news. Remember the big events.
- Take a fresh look at your siblings; what's interesting about the adults they have grown into?



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Ideas and Information for Parenting Practitioners

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Tips from the Field

Parent educators provide practical advice to new professionals

What advice would you give a new parent educator? That's the question Parenting Press asked the finalists in the "Favorite Parent Educator" program sponsored as part of the Press's 25th anniversary celebration.

Tell us whatever is important to *you*, we encouraged the educators, and they responded with dozens of tips, about everything from interpersonal relations, presentation style and handouts, time management and home visits. This issue we're sharing how-to's; for recommendations on major issues, see the Winter 2005 "Tips from the Field" column.

- **Be organized.** "Practice is the key to good presentations," says Christine Cerbana-Whaley of Colorado State University's Cooperative Extension Service. Prepare, know your material, collect everything you'll need and be clear about your objectives, she emphasizes.
- **Have back-up plans.** "Be prepared for anything during a home visit," recommends Karen Vaughan, with United Way of Central West Virginia. Have alternative lesson plans to meet the needs of different children or when there are several children in the home. Her colleague Malinda Peters, faced with a play group site that was often unexpectedly locked during the summer, packed a blanket and snacks in her car and turned the play group sessions into impromptu picnics. "The children loved it—many of them had never been on a picnic. The location also gave us the opportunity to

talk about the insects and the sky and everything in between."

- **Strive for small groups.** An intimate setting encourages parents to ask questions and share experiences, says Marilyn Mailman Segal, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale.
- **Allow plenty of time for questions.** Marilyn Heins, a Tucson pediatrician and parenting columnist, sets aside a quarter of her allotted speech time for audience comments. If you're running a workshop or a less formal program, you may need even more time for Q & A.
- **Squelch the butterflies in your tummy.** Feeling nervous? Don't think about yourself. Instead, says Mona Richardson, formerly with United Way of Central West Virginia, concentrate on your mission: to communicate parenting information. What you're doing *can* change the lives of children and families, she reminds.
- **Reinforce your message with something tangible.** Although Heins does not speak with slides, she uses handouts made from PowerPoint software. The format includes lines by each slide so that parents can take notes during her speeches. Elva Morrison, another member of the United Way of Central West Virginia team who does home visits, leaves behind activities the family can use until her next visit.

compiled by Linda Carlson