



Understanding Sibling Rivalry

Probably nothing upsets parents more on a daily basis than the constant bickering and fighting that goes on between children within the family. Some degree of rivalry and conflict is to be expected among siblings and is actually considered a normal part of growth. Children are learning to get along with others and this includes their brothers and sisters.

There are natural reasons for sibling rivalry:

- siblings are often different sexes
- they are different ages
- they have different temperaments and personalities
- competition for the attention of parents and other family members
- normal jealousy of what a sibling has or is allowed to do
- ordinary teasing that children do

Handling the Bickering and Fighting?

Try not to get involved in the fight or conflict and let the children work it out.

If the children know you will not step in, they usually can find a solution themselves. Do not get caught in the middle and find yourself in the situation of taking sides or placing blame without knowing all the details of the disagreement. If necessary separate the children and do the detective work later when everyone is calm and in control. Do not be too quick to blame the older child, the younger sibling may sometimes be the one who started the conflict.

[Back](#) | [Forward](#) | [Table of Contents](#)

Ways To Reduce Sibling Rivalry

- **Give undivided attention.** Try to spend time alone with each child doing something that they enjoy each day.
- **Encourage feelings of worth.** Praise children for what they are, not just for what they can do.
- **Don't always insist on sharing.** Each child is entitled to certain possessions that should not have to be shared with anyone.
- **Don't expect your children to play together all the time.** They need some freedom from each other.
- **Allow the older child to have his or her own way at least half the time.** Sometimes in our efforts to protect the younger child we treat or blame the older child unfairly.
- **Emphasize family unity and belonging.** Remind your children that no matter how unpleasant their behavior might be, they will always belong to you and each other. This will help provide inner security and will enhance their capacity for brotherly and sisterly love.
- **Consult you children.** A child can often provide insight on what another sibling might be struggling with or trying to express.
- **Don't focus on the misbehavior but acknowledge and reward appropriate behavior.**

Adapted from "Growing Up With Brothers and Sisters." Love and Limits: Parenting With Good Sense, Minnesota Extension Service.

Here Is An Idea For Inside or Outside Play

Are you concerned that your child may be spending too much time watching television, operating the computer, or playing video games and not getting enough physical exercise? If so, why not get them up and moving with a fun game of Milk Jug Catch? The equipment you need to play the game can be made from items around your home.

Materials needed:

- two or more empty one-gallon plastic milk jugs
- small ball (tennis or racquet balls work well) or bean bag
- scissors or knife for cutting (for adult use only!)



To make the mitt:

An adult needs to cut the jugs in half horizontally. You will use the top portion with the handle for the “catcher’s mitts.” After cutting the jugs, be sure to smooth any rough edges. (Save the bottom part of the jug for household containers; they are great for holding small toys, blocks, Legos, crayons, etc.)

To make the beanbag:

Take one half cup of uncooked beans and pour them into a small plastic sandwich bag. Squeeze the air out of the bag, leaving enough room for the beans to move around when shaken. Seal the bag with a twistee or tie it shut, then place the bag in the toe of an old sock (with no holes of course!). Tie the sock with a twistee or heavy string and cut off any excess material. (Caution: beans are a choking hazard and need to be kept away from younger children, especially those 3 years of age and younger.)

To play the game:

The object of the game is to toss the ball or bean bag to your partner, who will catch it with the milk jug mitt and toss it back to you without touching it with the hands. You will do the same. With young children, a larger, softer ball (low bounce) or a bean bag will be appropriate. Older kids with more coordination and strength may prefer a tennis ball or racquetball. You can increase the difficulty by increasing the distance between the players or getting more people to play.

Your child may also enjoy playing this game alone by tossing the tennis ball or racquetball up in the air and trying to catch it before it bounces or after it bounces. Playing this is a great way to have fun and get exercise at the same time! Enjoy the game and the time together!

(Source *365 TV-Free Activities You Can Do With Your Children*, Steve and Ruth Bennet, 1996)

Author: Kathy L. Jelley, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences, Brown County

Edited by: Rose Fisher Merkwowitz, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences/Community Development, Highland County.
 Elaine Collins, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences/Community Development, Adams County
 Carol Ford Arkin, Extension Specialist, Human Development, Ohio State University

All educational programs conducted by Ohio State University Extension are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender, age, disability or Vietnam-era veteran status.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Keith L. Smith, Director, Ohio State University Extension.

TDD # 1 (800) 589-8292 (Ohio only) or (614) 292-1868

11/97—200—des