

Senior Advice: Relax - sibling rivalry is normal

by *Doug_Mayberry*

Q: Our daughter has been complaining that her three children - all younger than 16 - are not getting along. She says their attitude is driving her crazy. We've tried to help with advice based on our experiences, but it doesn't seem to be working. What can we suggest that might be beneficial?

A: Competition and jealousy are normal in all families. Issues such as brother versus sister, who makes better grades, parents paying more attention to one child, and the kids teasing and bullying each other are part of everyday life.

Parents usually understand what is not working between their children and can encourage a better relationship by talking openly with them. If they feel they caused any part of the kids' problems, they can even set an example by admitting responsibility.

Favoritism on the part of parents or grandparents can cause trouble between siblings. My brother always said our mother favored me. Now, as adults, we have simply accepted it, and today we tease each other about it. But it wasn't always funny. Make sure your daughter doesn't make any distinction in the way she treats the three kids and that she never compares them to one another.

Parental stress can also increase sibling rivalry. If parents are constantly angry with each other, the kids will become angrier with their siblings, too. A weekly family meeting can help defuse some issues bothering both parents and children.

Parents should make the point that they love their children for different reasons and talents. They should encourage their children to cooperate with one another and to congratulate their siblings on their successes. This will mean that they, too, will be likely to receive congratulations from their brothers and sisters when they succeed. Remind them that when they are older, their siblings will most likely turn out to be their best friends.

Parents realize that as the kids get older they will change their attitudes about each other and focus on their abilities and personalities rather than their family competition. Communication, patience and understanding offer opportunities for children to become more mature and compromise their differences.

Most importantly, remind your daughter that these skirmishes are temporary, but her family is forever.

Q: I am in my 70s, and knowing that exercise is an important factor in maintaining my health, I take a vigorous 30-minute walk with a friend every day. Recently another friend mentioned that we should include strength training along with our walks. Can you explain what that involves?

A: Your friend's suggestion is an excellent one. Health trainers know we lose up to 7 pounds in muscle mass each decade beginning in our middle 20s. However, regular weekly strength training with dumbbells and Pilates classes strengthens the lower back and abdominal muscles.

Plan to lift barbells two or three times a week. Over time you'll have a good chance of increasing the strength in your legs, arms and back, and you will improve your flexibility. You'll also lose weight and build muscle. Visit a health club for more information and a better understanding of the benefits of adding training.

With all these benefits, strength training will make you feel healthier, more independent and stronger. Before starting it's wise to talk to your doctor. Don't let an excuse such as a lack of time to exercise block your good intentions. It's worth the trip!

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