

For Parents of young children

A Young Child And Other Children

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA ■ AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

"No, you can't have it."

"You can't play with us."

"I am not a baby."

"We dumped all your blocks out."

"I'm going home. And I'm not coming back again."

Do these remarks sound familiar? When you hear your children uttering them day after day you probably wonder if they'll ever become friendly, sociable people.

It's hard to realize that these unfriendly words represent a child's clumsy attempts to be friendly. Children are not born with social knowhow. They learn it on their own, using whatever skills they possess.

In a recent study entitled "The Social Approaches of Little Children," the author classified these approaches used by children in a group she observed:

Affectionate — patting, holding hands

Friendly — smiling, helping, offering something

Neutral — looking or watching

Unfriendly — teasing, snatching, interfering with play

Hostile — hitting, biting, kicking

The children in this study used friendly approaches about half the time, they used unfriendly and neutral approaches some of the time, and they used affectionate and hostile approaches only a small percentage of the time.

In the process of learning, little children use a variety of approaches with other children. As parents, we tend to notice the unfriendly more than the friendly ones.

Children need opportunities to be with other children and practice and improve their social skills. With a large family, the home furnishes a natural practice ground, if not at times an arena.

Brothers And Sisters

Why do children in the same family do so much quarreling? Why can't they love each other, you may ask. They usually do, as you soon find out if another child picks on one of them or if one of them is punished.

Often, brothers and sisters quarrel because of natural competition and rivalry. They are in a very real sense competing for the time, attention, and affection of their parents. Parents can save themselves endless trouble by giving their affection freely. If a child knows he will get his share of affection, he will be less likely to struggle against the others and be less resentful when a brother or a sister receives affection.

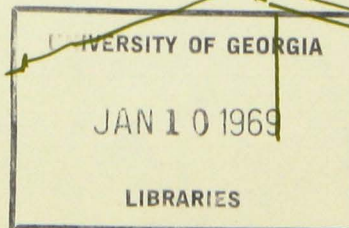
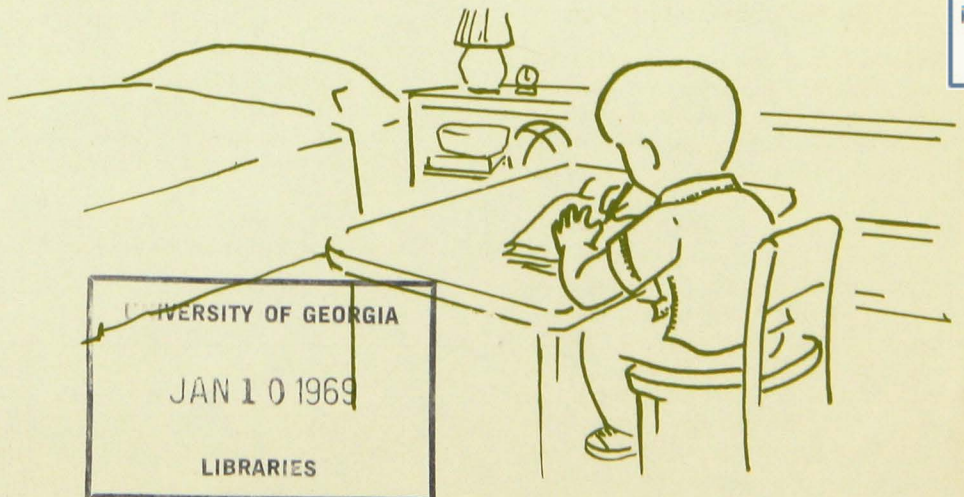
Four-year-old Mary may be striving unconsciously for her share of affection in relation to her 2-year-old brother. If he breaks her favorite doll, Mary may feel doubly threatened. The person who comes between her and her parents is the same person who breaks her toys. In such a situation, it sometimes helps if

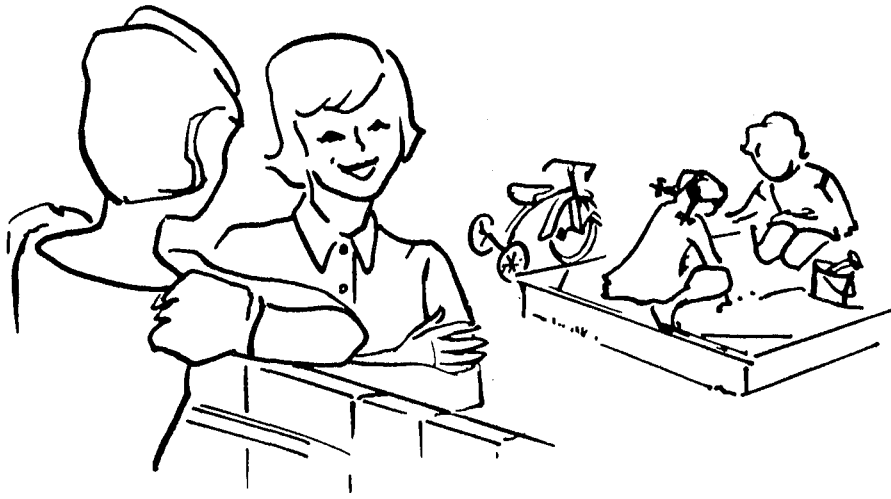
you let your child know that you understand how he feels when his younger brother or sister upsets him. If he knows he can talk over his problems with you without being scolded, it may help him get rid of his cross feelings at least some of the time.

It also helps if each child has shelves, drawers, clothes, and toys that everyone in the family, including his mother and father, respect as his own. Teaching your child to ask for permission to use others' belongings is a way of teaching him respect for things.

Do you find yourself repeatedly blaming one child when something goes wrong? Remember that it takes two to make a quarrel and that even an overly aggressive child is not aggressive all the time. Studies have shown that children who are usually cooperative or usually aggressive may act the opposite way at times.

No matter how much brothers and sisters enjoy each other, they can become irritable from being together too long.





If at all possible, separate them briefly even if it means arranging separate play activities in different rooms. But be careful to suggest it as something they will like, not as punishment.

Remember that complete agreement between brothers and sisters is no more desirable or expected than constant quarreling. It is better to let them work out their own quarrels, although you must interfere if one is getting hurt. When there's too much quarreling, separate the children or suggest a substitute activity.

Brothers and sisters make significant contributions to each other's growth and development. Several researchers have found that brothers and sisters use each other to learn about themselves. By learning how they are different and the same as their brothers and sisters, they enhance their own individuality. Children also learn about appropriate behavior for boys and girls from each other. What does it mean to be a boy? What does it mean to be a girl? When there are children of both sexes in a family, they can learn the masculine and feminine roles and behavior from each other.

The Neighbor's Children

Parents sometimes are puzzled by a child who begs for the company of other children and then behaves in a silly, unsocial, or even unkind way when he gets in a group. He probably does want companionship, but he is not grownup enough to know how to handle it. In such a case, plan ahead with your child, suggesting which toys they should play with, where they might play, and what they might eat. In general, try to show him what to expect. At first, let little children play together only for a short period. Also, the experience may be less frightening if you stay in sight. Although

it is somewhat easier for children to play out-of-doors, you'll probably have to provide quite a bit of behind the scenes supervision in either case.

When a neighbor child is too bold, be courteously firm and definite about what you expect when he comes to your house. You can say, "Stevie, we like people to knock before they come into our house," or "At our house we don't step on the new doll; we take it for a ride in the wagon."

It helps also if the neighbors can occasionally get together and talk about the children's play and reach some kind of agreement about what is expected in the neighborhood.

Children Who Seem Different

Sometimes children gang up on one child in the neighborhood. Indirect meth-

ods are better than direct interference in such matters. It might help to invite the outcast and one of the gang to play at your home, where you can set the stage for some friendly play.

Several children are playing store and you hear them say, "Billy, we don't want you to play with us." You might suggest something such as, "Billy could deliver the groceries for you on his bike." This suggestion might easily start a whole new train of thought in which exclusion will soon be forgotten.

As a parent, you should never let neighborhood feuds between adults interfere with your children's play. Remember that you can plant the seed of prejudice in your child's mind simply by what you do or what you say about your neighbors.

If you'll try to notice the number of friendly approaches your child makes, you won't be so discouraged over the times when he appears inadequate or unfriendly.

References

1. Gruenberg, Sidonie M. and Hilda Sidney Krech, *Your Child's Friends*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 285. (25¢)
2. Ross, Helen, *The Shy Child*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 239. (25¢)
3. Young, Margaret B., *How to Bring Up Your Child Without Prejudice*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 373. (25¢)

For copies of these pamphlets, write: Public Affairs Pamphlets, 22 East 38th St., New York, N.Y. 10016.

Family Activities With Preschool Children

- Why not have a family sing at the table, choosing songs that appeal to the young? Singing your table grace is a fine way of involving everyone.
- Parents, what personal skills can you share with your children — can you draw, paint, sing, or do sleight-of-hand tricks? When drawing or painting, don't set the standards too high or encourage imitation. Rather, let your child work out his own ideas. The fun of doing it together will be sufficient.
- Mother and Dad, some evening both of you read part of a story to your children. The next day, help them make some of the storybook people with clothespins. Use scraps of yarn, cloth, or paper for the clothes and hair. Glue milk bottle caps to the clothespins to make the dolls stand, or mount them in modeling clay.
- One of these evenings when you linger at the table, start the question "Guess what happened to me today?" as a time for listening and telling.

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