

# young families

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## Growing Up With Brothers and Sisters

What comes to mind when you hear the word sibling? Most people say rivalry; others say brother or sister. Rivalry and jealousy between siblings have an ancient and tragic tradition. Remember the Old Testament problems between Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau?

Some degree of sibling rivalry is here to stay. It should be accepted without surprise, fear, or anxiety. There is really no reason why your first-born child should welcome a new baby without some jealousy. Who would want to give up being the center of the universe? There are natural reasons for sibling rivalry. Siblings don't choose each other, yet they have to share the one or two people they want most for themselves. They are frequently different sexes, almost always different ages, and have different temperaments. They also have natural reasons for loving each other, becoming companions and friends when spending many hours together, and sharing a wide range of activities.

Two problem areas for parents as their children grow as brothers and sisters are fairness and fighting.

**Fairness**—One of the traps parents fall into is the notion that they should be "fair." But if parents treat all their children alike, they are being unfair to all of them, for they are not all alike. What is "fair" for one child may be "foul" for another. It is not equality that children crave, but to be recognized as individuals. Children want appropriate care for appropriate needs, and these are rarely exactly the same for any two children at any time in their lives.

Giving children an even chance of liking each other seems to depend heavily on NOT trying to be fair in your expenditure of time and attention. When you begin to weigh and measure these, the relationship is dehumanized. One mother's example: "Every time I hugged the baby I could feel Joel's accusing eyes on me, so I'd stop hugging the baby. Then I realized that was making me mad at Joel—I like to hug babies. So I did, whenever I felt like it, and that made me feel good. Then I felt like taking Joel off by himself for a story. No more watching and measuring, that cheats both of them."

One of the best things we can do for relations between our children is to stop making comparisons. Making comparisons can give the feeling they are only seen and judged in relation to others, rather than feeling they are seen in the fullness of their own unique variety.

**Fighting**—Most parents feel deep concern about the endless fighting that goes on among brothers and sisters. They love each child, and it hurts to see them fight or hurt each other. A great deal of child-raising energy goes into settling fights and trying to "teach" children to get along.

Difficult as it may be, it is best to intervene as little as possible. Some reasons for doing this are:

- If the children work it out by themselves, they will probably learn more and suffer less than if you step in.
- If you step in, it usually means blaming one or the other—most often the older one. Blaming can produce a chain reaction of feeling guilt, feeling inadequate, further resentment, quarreling, more fighting, more guilt, more feelings of inadequacy.
- If they know you really won't step in, they usually can find a solution themselves.
- Be a sensitive observer, however, sometimes you must step in to avoid a catastrophe.

Many times parents side with the baby or the youngest, protecting the youngest from the oldest. This reinforces the younger one on how to gain special consideration, and adds to the very predicament you want to eliminate. When left on their own, children can establish far more equal and just relationships than we can. They learn through reality to develop diplomacy, fair play, and consideration for each other. If these are what you want your children to learn, it may mean stepping out of some situations and giving them room.

Usually there is some cause for the fighting, but don't search for the cause at the moment of the fight. Separate the children if necessary, without making either one feel like a criminal, and do the detective work later. Don't expect your children to play together all the time. They need some freedom from each other. Above all, let your children know that you love them equally, though each in a different way.

*(compiled by Ron Pitzer, extension family life specialist, University of Minnesota)*

## Enjoy Minnesota History

A study of family vacations indicates a preference for scenic views and historical places. Minnesota has plenty of both, and they are found together usually because much of Minnesota's early history took place on its rivers and lakes.

The Minnesota Historical Society operates 22 major historic sites that are open to the public. There are several in the Twin Cities area including Historic Fort Snelling where costumed guides demonstrate many of the military and craft skills of the early 1800's.

If you follow the Minnesota River from Le Sueur to Montevideo you will be close to eight of the historic sites. One unusual site is the Jeffers Petroglyphs set in the midst of virgin prairie. Here native Americans left their carvings on ancient

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red rocks, some made perhaps as long ago as 3000 B.C., and others as recent as the 1700's. Human figures, weapons, and animals are included in the carvings.

The other historic sites are located throughout central and northern Minnesota. For information and specific locations of all the sites, write to:

Minnesota Historical Society  
Historic Sites Division  
Building 25, Fort Snelling  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55111

Another publication to help you plan your Minnesota vacation or summer weekend excursions is *Minnesota Minnetours*. This describes eleven Minnetours full of historical, natural, and recreational attractions. It's available from:

Minnesota Department of Economic Development  
Tourism Division  
480 Cedar Street  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

## Plan Your Vacation

Vacations are best when you've taken the time to do some planning ahead of time. This is even more important when traveling by car with small children.

Here are some "bits of wisdom" to help yours be a happier vacation:

- Establish safety and housekeeping rules for the car.
- Put luggage in the trunk or on the outside and have more room inside for people.
- Stop every 100 miles for letting off energy and to rest the driver.
- Travel only 8 hours a day, including stops, with children.
- Bring along fresh fruit and vegetable snacks, a jug of water, and damp washcloths in a plastic bag.
- Use a cookie sheet, tray, or covered cake pan as a table top for drawing, coloring, and reading.
- Have a bag with old favorites and a new toy, a pillow, and a change of clothing for each child.
- Include action activities, such as climbing rocks, rather than seeing them in a museum; catching fish is better than visiting an aquarium.



## Camping With Children

If you're camping with young children, it's best to start with weekend trips. A few days before leaving, have the children try out their sleeping bags.

**Food**—Plan meals before leaving on your camping trip. Plan foods the entire family enjoys eating; this is not the time to introduce new foods to children. With modern campstoves and coolers, meals can be similar to those prepared at home.

Always have food for one extra day. If not used, what could be better when you get home than having food available for tired, hungry children and parents.

**Clothes**—Plan for a daily change of clothes plus a spare outfit. Brightly colored clothing helps you spot your children when they're off playing. Pack the clothes in outfits for each child. A clothes line and clothes pins are good camping supplies to dry clothes and towels, and air sleeping bags.

**Activities**—Make each child a "treasure bag." It can be a fancy one made of fabric with a drawstring, or a paper or plastic one. In this, children can collect seeds, cones, stones, shells, etc., (with help from you on what can and can't be picked up). Every evening have a show and tell time about that day's treasures. When the bag gets full, the children have to decide what to keep and what to throw away. One bag is the limit.

**Responsibilities**—No matter how small, everyone should have a job. Even toddlers can be "wash cloth holders" until a washing area is set up. Special responsibilities make the child feel important, and help get everything done—getting the tent up, getting water and wood, setting the table.

With some advance planning and a few surprises tucked in along the way, camping with young children can be the way to go!

## Announcing

- A way to begin strengthening family life is to focus on the positive, unique aspects, to be more aware of what your family has going for it, and to really appreciate these facts. Does that sound intriguing? To guide your family in celebrating their family life, request Extension Folder 439, *Celebrating Family Life!* from your county extension office (listed in telephone directory under county offices).
- If your house was the victim of ice dams this past winter, request Forestry Fact Sheet 12, *Preventing Ice-Dams on Minnesota Homes* from your county extension office, and be ready for next winter.
- "Talk of Many Things," an audience call-in program, has begun on radio station KUOM (770 am) from 11:00 to 12 noon every Thursday. A panel of experts will discuss and answer listeners questions on current issues important to family and community. The weekly program is sponsored by the Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota.

## This Issue

This newsletter is published by the Agricultural Extension Service of your University of Minnesota for young families in the Twin Cities area. I would appreciate your suggestions for its content. Call me at 823-5241.

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