

young families

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Sibling Rivalry

Probably nothing upsets parents more on a daily basis than constant bickering and fighting between their children. If you can accept the fact that sibling rivalry is a normal part of growth, you will find it easier to deal with your children's fighting. It takes children years to learn some of the basic lessons in human relationships, and this includes getting along with sisters and brothers.

Some conflict between sisters and brothers is to be expected. With more than one child in a family, there will always be a certain amount of competition, as children vie for their parent's attention and try to prove one way or another that they are the "best." Sometimes a child may be jealous because of what a sibling received or was permitted to do. Children's personalities don't always match perfectly. Conflict can also result from the ordinary teasing that children do.

If fighting between your children bothers you, stop it. Resist the temptation to lecture or nag. Whatever technique you use (commanding your children to stop, separating them, etc.), stay with your resolve to stop the fighting until the episode is really over.

Once the unpleasant behavior is stopped, try to pinpoint the cause. If teasing and squabbling occur with troubling frequency and intensity, it usually means that one or all of the children feel that they are not getting enough affection, praise, recognition, or some other form of attention.

Here are some ways you can help reduce feelings of rivalry, jealousy, and resentment among your children:

- Give undivided attention. Try to spend some time alone with each child doing something that the child really enjoys. Ten minutes a day for a week can turn around a child's feelings of being left out or unimportant.
- Respect individuality. Each child is different and their unique needs and strengths should be recognized. If you treat all your children "just alike," they will come to expect equal amounts of everything. Reassure your children that you will respond to each individual's unique needs — not that all get the same response.
- Encourage feelings of worth. Praise and build up each child for what they are, not just for what they can do.
- Avoid comparisons. Resist the temptation to motivate your children by comparing them to each other or to other children. Such comparisons make children fear coming out poorly in a contest and may lead to competitiveness.
- Don't always insist on sharing. Each child is entitled to certain possessions that should not have to be shared with anyone. If you clearly establish this right, you may be amazed at your child's willingness at times to voluntarily share previously fought-over possessions.

- Allow the older child to have his or her own way at least half the time. Sometimes in our efforts to protect the younger children, we overbalance the scales. Remember also that the younger, smaller, and seemingly less powerful sibling may sometimes be the instigator or manipulator of the conflict.
- Don't focus on the misbehavior. If one child is hurting another, direct your attention to the "victim" and try to soothe the child. It's a common mistake to focus on the "villain" first to stop the hitting, biting, or hair pulling. But that merely teaches a child how to get your attention first.
- Emphasize family unity and permanence. If your children say nasty things about one another to you, point out that no matter how unpleasant the sister's or brother's behavior may be, he or she is still and will always be "one of us." When we consistently remind our children that they unalterably belong to us and to each other, we strengthen their inner sense of safety. This inner security will enhance their capacity for brotherly and sisterly love.
- Consult your children. Children can often contribute valuable insights on what a sibling is struggling with, thinking about, or trying to express. If you ask one child to help you understand another, take the contribution seriously and let the child know you will reflect on the insights shared.

Ronald L. Pitzer
Extension Family Life Specialist

Books and Children

A gift of a book may be one of the best investments you can make in a child's future. A good book can strike the spark that will lead to a lifetime of enjoyable reading.

Books can help teach children about the mysteries of life and death, of science and nature, of good and evil. Books can also help a child understand people — all kinds of people from every land on earth (and beyond).

Some children do not have a wide range of experience. Through books, they can gain insight into the world, its problems, joys, beauties, and sights. They can learn about danger, peril, adventure, the glories of the past, the challenges of the future. Bold men and women, the famous and near famous, come alive in the pages of a book.

Young children who will listen as a parent reads to them can be given books with large, colorful pictures of animals, boys and girls, and other things a child of two, three, or four can understand.

As children grow a little older and begin school, they enjoy stories of other children like themselves, as well as stories about pets and toys. By seven or eight, the child likes fantasy and fairy tales, animal stories, humorous stories, and adventures with exciting dangers and feats.

A good book can start children on an interesting and enormously rewarding voyage of discovery that will last all the years of their lives.

Ronald L. Pitzer
Extension Family Life Specialist

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Holiday Hazards

The holiday season brings some special poisoning hazards, but you can ensure your family's safety if you are aware of the dangers and take the necessary precautions.

Mistletoe, Jerusalem cherry, and holly plants are very poisonous. If any parts of these plants are ingested, call the Minnesota Poison Control System immediately. These plants all have berries which may attract children. Hanging mistletoe does not ensure safety because the berries can fall off.

Generally, Christmas trees do not cause problems, but if the needles are ingested, they may cause an upset stomach and some vomiting. The Christmas cactus is nontoxic, but can cause diarrhea and vomiting if ingested in large quantities.

The poinsettia is not as poisonous as originally believed, and is considered safe to have in the home. The sap can cause a slight skin irritation in some people and the leaves can irritate the mouth and stomach lining if ingested in large quantities.

Evergreen scent spray and snow spray are nontoxic. However, use caution when spraying so that the product is not inhaled. Preservatives for Christmas trees are usually a sugar solution and are not toxic. If the solution is homemade and you have questions about the safety of any of the ingredients, check with the poison center.

Tinsel and icicles are not usually a problem if small amounts are ingested, but if large amounts are ingested, or coughing or choking occur, call the poison center immediately. Shellacked ornaments and the liquids and snow particles in snow globes are generally not poisonous.

One of the most potentially dangerous poisons people have in their homes during the holiday season is alcohol. Even relatively small amounts (½ to one ounce) of alcohol can cause severe problems in a child. Keep all liquor, beer, and wine out of the reach of small children. After parties make sure all glasses are emptied and not left standing on tables. Often, curious children empty the glasses as they have seen the adults do.

Foods cooked or baked with alcohol are safe for children because the alcohol vaporizes with heat.

Emergency Telephone Numbers

If you suspect a poisoning, call the Minnesota Poison Control System immediately. The numbers to call are: Twin Cities 221-2113 (east metro) or 347-3141 (west metro); outstate (toll-free) 1-800-222-1222. Poison information specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer all calls.

Preschoolers and Poisons

A new booklet entitled "Pre-schoolers and Poisons" is available from the Minnesota Poison Control System.

Focusing on the "dangerous years" — the first five — the booklet offers suggestions to parents and caregivers on establishing safe environments for preschoolers and preventing childhood poisonings.

To obtain the booklet, write to the Education Department, Minnesota Poison Control System, St. Paul-Ramsey Medical Center, 640 Jackson St., St. Paul, MN 55101. A donation of \$1.00 for a single copy is requested (but not required). For larger quantities, the charge is 30 cents per booklet. Organizations unable to pay should contact the Education Department at (612) 221-3193.



Teaching Children to Give

Holiday time provides a good opportunity to teach your children about giving to others. Children need to learn whom to give to, how to choose an appropriate gift, and how to match their resources to the gift.

Let young children choose one or two individuals to give gifts to. These are likely to be persons the child interacts with often. With older children, discuss whether they wish to include persons they have not thought of themselves. Never force children to give gifts. If you feel it is important for your children to remember additional individuals beyond the ones they have chosen, you may wish to include their names on gifts given by other family members.

Discuss with your child what kinds of gifts to give. Encourage your child to think of the recipient's wants, needs, or interests. The important thing is for the child to think about the person receiving the gift rather than the child's own interests.

Young children may have little concept of cost and how they might obtain gifts. Discuss items they may produce as well as those they might purchase. Older children might give services. For purchased gifts, talk about items that are in their price range. If members of your family have a holiday or gift allowance, consider the amount of that fund that might be appropriate for each child. Give young children the money immediately before the purchase and in the amount for a specific gift.

Children can also share in planning, preparing, wrapping, and giving of gifts from the family. Discuss who is on the list and why. This is a good time to talk about the feelings of others in regard to being remembered with a gift.

*Dottie A. Goss, Former Extension Specialist
Family Resource Management*

This Issue

This newsletter is published for Minnesota young families by the Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota, and distributed through your local county extension service office. Please call your county extension agent, Home Economics, with your suggestions for its content.

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

Hennepin County Extension Office
3410 Plymouth Boulevard
Plymouth, Minnesota 55447
(612) 559-4321
Located—lower level
Plymouth City Center Building

November - December 1985

Greetings,

I hope this newsletter finds you and your family in good health and ready to face the coming winter.

As you know the holiday season is fast approaching. Holidays are great times to spend with families, enjoying traditions and starting new ones. Holidays always seem to bring us closer together, causing us to reflect on just how important families are to us.

In this issue, there is an article on teaching children the art of giving. Help your children get caught up in the spirit of giving by including them in planning, preparing, wrapping and giving of gifts. Gift giving can be a rewarding experience for the whole family.

Another aspect of the holiday season, holiday hazards, which is not so pleasant, is also included in this issue. Read the labels on products carefully and take the necessary precautions. Be sure to note the emergency numbers that are listed.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission is an agency that you can call in regards to toy safety and any products that you have concerns about. You may want to keep these phone numbers handy for your use during the season. In the Twin Cities metro area, call (612) 725-4440 or toll free 1-800-638-2772.

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We are recruiting for Consumer Answering - Telephone Teachers who would staff the telephone and computer (IBM-PC) 1/2 days - afternoons, at least one 1/2 day per week during the last part of January, all of February and March.

This is an opportunity to learn computer operation skills and update yourself on home economics subject matter. Training will be available on computer operation and on methods of telephone teaching during the last week in January.

As a volunteer, you will be working in the Plymouth Office. For job description and application form or other information, please call Diane Corrin at 559-4321.

Happy Holidays!

Sincerely,

Beth L. Thompson

Beth L. Thompson
University of Minnesota
Student Intern
Hennepin County Extension Service

BLT:ja

Hennepin County
Agricultural Extension Service
3410 Plymouth Boulevard
Plymouth, MN 55447

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