

Becoming Jealous of a Sibling

by Shari Steelsmith

Tip – Though some siblings get along easily from the beginning, we usually have to work to bring out the best from both sides.

It's very common for older children to become jealous of a new or younger sibling. It is also common for a younger child to become jealous of an older sibling.

Older kids see parents spending extra time with babies or toddlers and feel jealous of that attention – or they observe that less is asked of a younger sibling and they often feel this is unfair. Younger siblings are less prone to begrudge their older siblings time with parents, but feel left-out when they are not included in more mature activities. "At about age three and a half," comments

pediatric nurse Helen Neville, author of *Is This a Phase? Child Development & Parent Strategies, Birth to 6 Years*, "children may be especially jealous of attention paid to other family members."

Tools – Although problems with jealousy between siblings are common and developmentally normal, they certainly aren't any fun to have in your home – nor should you let them fester. Here is some practical advice on how to help children accept each other.



Helping Siblings Get Along with Each Other:

- Explain that babies and toddlers need lots of help from older family members; they can't eat, use the bathroom, talk, or even get their own toys the same way your older child can.
- Point out that every child in your family is unique. Each one is a different age, has different strengths, and a different personality from siblings. Tell your child that you treat each sibling according to what that person needs, not according to what the other one has or doesn't have. The underlying message here is "You're special and one-of-a-kind. I love you and will meet your individual needs."
- Make sure older children get lots of hugs and a chance to talk about how they feel.
- Spend regular alone time with your older child. If s/he has reliable, uninterrupted access to your time, there will be fewer problems when the younger one is around.
- Younger children often want whatever the older sibling is holding. Explain that little ones copy in order to learn from older people they like. Support your older child's rights, but show him how to offer the younger sibling something similar.
- Emphasize that everyone gets turns. It may be the older child's turn to go to a birthday party; tell your younger one that his turn will come.

