

Cathy's Column

Best-selling author and foster carer Cathy Glass gives her top tips to avoid sibling rivalry

Foster carers often look after sibling groups or foster a child in addition to their own children leading to one big happy family. Or does it? In an ideal world all the children in the family play happily together, in reality raising siblings – fostered and/or birth children – can stretch parents and carers to the limit. First, let's look at the reasons why siblings fight and then at the strategies to correct it.

Reasons siblings fight:

- 1 Favouritism:** a child feels a sibling receives more time and attention or is disciplined less.
- 2 Jealousy:** a child is jealous of a new arrival – baby, stepbrother/sister, or a new foster child.
- 3 Physical factors:** children who are bored, hungry or tired are more likely to become fractious and fight.
- 4 Resentment:** a child feels worthless when their achievements are compared to those of a sibling.
- 5 Attention:** siblings who are not given enough attention are more likely to resort to bad behaviour to gain attention.
- 6 Unfair responsibility:** a child is asked to look after another child in the family.

How to solve the problems:

The dos and don'ts of parenting siblings whether they are foster children or birth children.

- 1 Don't compare your children with each other.** A comment such as 'Tom always does his homework. Why don't you, Claire?' will build up resentment.
- 2 Don't label a child** – 'Tom has always been difficult/Claire's very

self-centred': the label will stick.

3 Don't give a child responsibility for another child. This usually occurs as a result of an older child being asked to look after a younger child but may also result from a birth child looking after a foster child.

4 Don't have favourites or show favouritism, no matter how difficult one child is being.

5 Don't make fun of a child or employ siblings to side with you – 'Isn't Tom's behaviour silly, Claire?' won't help your discipline, your relationship with Tom, or Tom and Claire's relationship with each other.

6 Don't tell your children that their behaviour is uncontrollable – 'I

don't know what to do with you!' will seem to them like an achievement and engender more negative behaviour.

7 Do treat all children as individuals and equals; if you are prone to favouritism, keep a check on it.

8 Do spend time one to one with each child, as well as spending time with the children all together.

9 Do spend time each day playing with the children. A board game, painting or game of catch in the garden works wonders for uniting the family.

10 Do eat dinner together. It bonds the family.

11 Do listen to, talk to and discuss with each child



Be sure to talk with each child individually as well as together

individually as well as with the children all together.

12 Do have regular family outings. A trip to the park is just as valuable an experience as an expensive visit to a theme park.

13 Do praise each child. He or she won't be good at everything, but every child is good at something.

14 Do guide and discipline, equally and fairly. If teenage Tom has to be in by 10.30pm, Claire does too.

Siblings won't always get along with each other but keeping in mind the above will reduce sibling rivalry.

More advice on siblings and other child rearing matters can be found in Happy Kids by Cathy Glass.

Find more from Cathy here:

www.cathyglass.co.uk 