

## **SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Introduction:**

*Have students draw a picture of their family. After drawing the picture, have students list the qualities, traits, etc. that they feel they have because of their place in the family.*

Relationships with brothers and sisters, or sibling relationships, are important aspect of family relationships across the family life cycle.

*How can a sibling relationship be a positive part of a family?*

Brothers and sisters are important to each other as role models and supporters, and as members of a coalition for dealing with parents.

### **SIBLING ROLES**

What are brothers and sisters to one another? Depending upon their respective ages and sexes, siblings may be playmates and companions, teachers and learners, protectors and dependents, or adversaries.

Older brothers or sisters become models for their younger siblings, who may learn many tasks and games from the older children. Older children sometimes experience *role conflict*. They may resent having their younger brothers and sisters tag after them, especially if parents insist that the older children share their friends with younger brothers and sisters.

### **SIBLING RIVALRY**

***Question:*** *What are some typical things brothers and sisters have problems with or argue about?*

Competition among children of the same family for their parents' affections or for dominance is called *sibling rivalry*. It is extremely common, and it sometimes persists into adult life.

Younger children typically copy and try to excel in areas in which older children have previously succeeded. Since all children are not equally talented in all fields and activities, such competition may have bad results for the less gifted child. Each child in a family should be encouraged to explore his/her own individual interests and talents.

One or both parents sometimes single out one child as the "best" and another as the "black sheep." Efforts to disguise such feelings are almost always unsuccessful. In this situation, children perceive the parents' attitudes and compete with one another for

affection and approval. Rivalry may continue in adult life when the siblings compete among themselves over who shall host the family holiday celebration or who shall look after an ailing parent.

When different family members are in different growth stages, their relationships are affected as much by their growth needs as by their different personalities. Adolescents and parents often have particular interpersonal problems that may be intensified when both of them are going through transitional periods. Rivalry and sometimes downright aggression are expressed. Sibling relationships are often influenced by different growth stages. It is extremely common and sometimes persists into adult life.

Next to the parent-child relationship, the sibling relationship is probably the strongest. Explaining rivalry as well as closeness between brothers and sisters, family theorists either look to overlapping stages or note that all children compete in some way for a parent's attention. They also enjoy deep sharing. Teaching and socializing is often the role of an older brother or sister. Especially in early years, there is probably no greater confidence than that entrusted to or shared with siblings. The older sibling is not only teacher but caretaker and companion.

**Assignment:** *Give students time to complete the handout "Living with Bothers and Sisters". After giving students time to complete ask for students to volunteer some of the things they wrote on their handout.*

## **BIRTH ORDER**

**Activity:** *( markers and butcher paper is needed for this activity.) Have students get into groups of the same birth order position. If some groups are too large have them divide up into small groups. Give them the following instructions: "Each member of the group needs to think of an adjective that describes you as a person. You will then share these with the rest of your group. If the majority of the group agrees that characteristic fits them as well then you write it on your butcher paper. Continue to do this until you have a list of characteristics that are common in your group. After your group is done hang it on the board."*

After about ten minutes the groups should be done with their list and you may discuss the characteristics they have listed. Discuss the following points with the class:

1. Exceptions in traits, you will not possess all the traits and may have some of another birth order depending on their position in their family.
2. It is important to focus on positive traits of each birth order
3. Becoming aware of uniqueness
4. How to use the information to understand ourselves and others.  
Knowledge of birth order can help you as a parent to understand our children better.
5. Do not use traits as labels or stereotypes

The order in which children are born in to a family has an influence on the development of the children. The stages in the family life cycle are based on the age of the oldest child because everything the firstborn does is new to the parents. Oldest children bear the burden of the parents' heaviest expectations and also of the parents' heaviest expectations and also of the parent's inexperience in raising children. Oldest children receive the parents' undivided attention until the next child is born.

Younger children often generally benefit from the parents

Experience with the oldest child. Second or third-born children are generally treated in more relaxed ways by the parents. Such children also receive care from the older child or children if the age difference is sufficient. Older children often grow up to become very responsible or achievement-oriented. Their early experience makes them independent. They have cared for younger children and also have learned to make their way in the outside world.

Older children often seek satisfaction outside of the home because of the parents' preoccupation with care of the younger child or children.

The younger child in a family often has the most difficult time in making the transition to adulthood. The family "baby" is sometimes treated as less mature than the other children, partly because of the parents' fear to lose the last child. Remember that these are typical patterns only. There are many families with unassertive oldest children or independent younger children.

(See if you agree with the birth order character traits listed on the transparency.)

Sibling relationships are complicated. At various stages of your life your siblings may become your best friends or some of your worst enemies. The type of relationship you have with your siblings is up to you. Make the most of it!

## **TYPICAL BIRTH ORDER CHARACTERISTICS**

The oldest child is:

1. Usually set up as an example to the other children.
2. Treated more like an adult by his/her parents.
3. A high achiever
4. Given and accepts more responsibility than the other children.
5. Usually college bound.
6. Independent
7. Is affectionate

The middle child:

1. May work extra-hard to get recognition.
2. Is usually a peace maker.
3. is somewhat average in schoolwork, but is an all-around good student
4. Is usually a calm, even-tempered adult.

The youngest child:

1. Gets a lot of attention, along with a lot of bossing.
2. May be spoiled
3. Usually matures quickly
4. May be undisciplined and irresponsible
5. Is easy-going about school.

6. Likes to associate with someone who takes charge of situations.