

WAMHS Newsletter

Dear Parents and Carers, this edition of the WAMHS newsletter focuses on **Sibling Rivalry**; we hope you will find some of the advice helpful during lockdown. You can find more information in *The Incredible Years* by Carolyn Webster-Stratton.

Sibling Rivalry

Bickering, arguing and fights between siblings are a normal part of growing up. Parents sometimes feel disappointed about this, as they might think it reflects unhappy relationships.

However, there are some pros to sibling rivalry. For instance, through the experience of disagreeing with each other, children learn how to stand up for their rights and express their feelings, and can learn to solve relationship difficulties and resolve conflicts in a healthy, constructive way.

That said, physical fights should never be allowed. It is important to consider the messages we give to children and avoid giving them the message that it is OK to hit or be hit.

Why Does Sibling Rivalry Occur?

If we want to change a particular behaviour, then it's helpful to start by reflecting on why the behaviour is happening in the first place. This way, we can figure out what changes we need to make in our child's behaviour and in our own behaviour.

It can be helpful to think about times when your children get along well vs. times when they don't. What helps?
What doesn't help?

In the case of sibling rivalry, some common causes include: personality clashes, adults showing favouritism for one sibling, older siblings resenting the attention given to younger ones, children imitating conflicts between parents, or emotional difficulties, such as sadness or worry.

What Helps?

Ignore minor squabbles - There will be times when you are called in to settle minor disputes. If you teach your children problem solving skills (see next page), then you can encourage them to settle it themselves.

Set up a reward programme - Explain to your children that if they don't bicker or fight for a certain amount of time, they'll each get a sticker. Tell them that they will also earn a sticker every time you see them sharing or co-operating with each other. Agree on the number of stickers they will have to collect in order to receive a reward (see below for top tips on rewards charts). Watch for when they play quietly together and provide praise as well as stickers.

Love uniquely - Treating children in exactly the same way can create competitiveness. Children sometimes need a distinct parenting approach. Try to treat each child as a unique and special person with their own talents and needs. Avoid comparing children; this can create jealousy. Give special privileges appropriate to their age and when you buy things, base your decision on need rather than fairness.

Encourage separate spaces and give each child special time with you - Often a younger child will want to play with an older sibling, but encourage your children to have some separate experiences and pursuits, including uninterrupted time alone with you.

Family meetings and house rules - if your children fight a lot try scheduling a family meeting to explain that physical fights are not allowed in your family home. During the meeting you might agree on a few house rules and stick them on the fridge for everyone to see.

Top Tips for Rewards Charts

- ✓ Choose one or two behaviours
- ✓ Focus on positive behaviours (those you would like to see more of)
- ✓ Involve your child in creating the chart and choosing the reward from a menu
- ✓ Add inexpensive rewards to the menu, such as, activities e.g. baking, reading or football
- ✓ Be clear and specific about rewards and how they can be earned
- ✓ Gradually replace rewards with social approval
- ✓ Give praise alongside rewards
- ✓ Give the message that you expect they will eventually be able to carry out the desired behaviour without a reward

Problem Solving

Find a time when your children are calm and teach them how to resolve conflict with a discussion.

The five steps to problem solving:

1. What is my problem?
2. How could I deal with this problem?
Encourage your child to come up with lots of solutions and write them all down (even the unhelpful ones!). The next steps will help your child to think about which solution is best.
3. What are the positive consequences of each solution?
4. What are the negative consequences of each solution?
5. On balance, what is the best solution?

For younger children, you might make up stories or use puppets to illustrate problems they're having e.g. puppets squabbling over screen time.

Encourage the use of their new skill the next time a conflict occurs and give praise when children solve a problem.

Friendships and Peer Problems

Children have spent a lot less time with their friends this year than they typically would. They might have forgotten some of the friendship/social skills they had previously learned and had more frequent fallouts with friends when they went back to school following the first lockdown.

You can practice social skills at home. For instance:

- Role-play scenarios where the parent models appropriate behaviours e.g. joining a game, sharing, taking turns or solving a conflict.
- Play daily with your child to model and encourage social skills. Praise them for friendly play skills and co-operation.
- During play interactions, coach them to learn skills such as listening and waiting to talk, asking another child about their feelings, showing interest and inviting someone to play.

If conflicts arise when children return to school, then you can encourage them to talk to you about it and use their problem solving skills, as described above.

Natural and Logical Consequences

(These work best with children over 5 years of age)

It can be hard to trace an argument back to "who started it".

This also encourages children to tell tales on each other. Instead, when fights occur, try introducing natural and logical consequences for both children. For instance:

Arguing over a toy → Take the toy away

Arguing over the TV → Turn off the TV

Mess in the kitchen → Both children clean up

Having consequences for both children will help to teach them the value of walking away from a potential conflict.

Remember to decide on consequences ahead of time and always follow through. If you are co-parenting, then make sure that you and your partner agree and work together as a team.

Consequences should not be degrading or cause physical pain. Instead, they should help children to learn to make good choices and be more responsible.



This year, our classrooms have calm down corners, that is, a designated space that children feel secure in and can use to relax or calm down.

We recommend talking to your children about these and introducing them at home too. You can suggest time in the calm corner if you notice them starting to bicker.

Supporting Your Family Emotionally Through Covid-19

We would like to take this opportunity to direct you to a webinar hosted by the First Steps Community Psychology Service:

1. Visit www.cityandhackneycamhs.org.uk
2. Click on 'Resources and Videos'
3. Scroll down to 'Supporting your family emotionally through Covid-19'

This hour long webinar helps parents understand the emotions they and their child may be experiencing during the pandemic, and provide ideas around supporting their children's emotional wellbeing.

The City and Hackney CAMHS website also includes general advice on how to access support if you are concerned about your child's mental health or wellbeing.