



Welcome back to Parenting 2.0. I hope you've had a chance to work on your own potential guilt or even start to prepare things in a way to avoid such guilt from becoming the reality. I want to take a moment to remind you that working on guilt is an ongoing process once you're parent. As soon as you find you've gotten over guilt in one area, I can almost guarantee it will crop up elsewhere. I wish I could tell you that it will pass, but in a way perhaps it shouldn't.

You see, guilt is our brain trying to tell us when we aren't sure of things. It's supposed to keep us in check and make sure we do what we need to do for ourselves and those around us. When it comes to raising our kids, we absolutely should want to ensure we are taking care of them in the best way we can; this is where guilt can be our friend or our enemy. If we fight against it, we either miss the lessons we need to learn and thus it crops up in the same area over and over *or* it consumes us and takes us down the dark path to shame. But if we embrace it for what it is, we learn. And let's face it, there is *a lot* to learn in parenting so guilt is bound to come up now and again. I just wanted to add that little reminder because I know each of the topics we cover may cause you to experience that feeling of guilt again and so you should remember it's normal to feel it, but how you react to it will be crucial to how healthy it is for you and your kids.

Moving on... As I discussed last week, one of the elements that tends to cause a lot of stress and guilt for parents is the sibling relationship. Let's face it - we all have images of our kids being the best of friends forevermore. Some of us have that reality of being close to our siblings, but many of us don't. The question we are often asking is what can we do to facilitate this relationship? I think one of the problems for many parents is that they believe that the relationship is solely in their hands and that they will make or break the sibling bond. In reality the bond is as complicated as any other and no one person or two people outside the relationship can make it or break it.

Week 2: Sibling Bonds

The first thing to remember is that your kids are individuals and they will have preferences and experiences and temperaments that may or may not align with their siblings. You don't have control over all of those things and just as you can't force friendships amongst kids, you can't force them amongst siblings either. But we can do some things that at least set the stage for the relationship and that's the focus this week. You may worry you've gone beyond a certain stage, but the ideas here can be implemented at any stage. What I mean is that there is no 'missed boat' opportunities here so if you're already in the thick of sibling struggles, still read the preparation section because there may be things you get from it anyway. No matter where you are, you can always start to make those positive changes.

Let's dive in...

Section 1: Preparation



Let's start for those of you who haven't welcomed baby #2 yet. If you've already welcomed baby #2, I do suggest reading this as if you did make certain moves early, there still may be things you want to backtrack on or consider talking to your kids about if you feel it was a mistake.

Many of you will have read all sorts of things about welcoming a new sibling and all the preparation you need to make. Most suggestions centre on making your eldest more independent so that you can tend to your baby. I will say right now I find most of these suggestions off the mark in terms of helping our kids feel better about this transition. Although we'll talk about sleep and changes in routine in week 3, you should know that for the most part, we don't actually have to make many changes for our eldest and that is really important because the more changes we make, the harder the transition for them.

In terms of preparation, I have three main areas that we will review: making changes, talking about the new baby, and shifting our expression of love. These are really the most important areas of preparation for they will often define how the start of this sibling relationship goes.

Section 1a: Making Changes

You may have read that all changes should happen before the arrival of the new baby so your eldest doesn't associate change they don't like with their sibling. There is room for this in some areas, but I find it actually best to leave as much as we can similar because those few months of change are not going to be enough to really facilitate the type of positive relationship with the new addition that we hope for. And when we do need to make changes after the arrival of baby #2, we can actually do it in a way that doesn't throw the baby under the proverbial bus.

Why would we not want to make all sorts of changes?

Week 2: Sibling Bonds

1. Most importantly, we don't know what changes we *will* need to make. So often we decide on changes based on what we think we will need which turns out not to be what we needed at all. For example, one of the big changes most families make is to get the eldest sleeping independently in their own room out of fear of them being woken by the baby. We'll talk about this more next week, but many times, that change isn't what's needed (even if some change is).
2. These changes often need more time than we think and so we aren't in a good state when new baby arrives. This is particularly the case for higher-needs or sensitive or orchid children or when there are lots of changes families want to make in preparation for baby #2. Unfortunately, being in the thick of change when a new baby arrives just means even more stress for everyone.
3. They still link it to baby. Unless you plan on not talking about pregnancy to your child and just acting like you're gaining weight until you come home with a new baby, our children - even young ones - are not stupid and will end up linking these changes to this new addition. It won't be as bad as if you actively blame the baby for these changes, but our kids are designed to pick up on patterns and will do so regardless. Thus the issue of blame that you're trying to avoid is one you may inadvertently cause.

I did, however, say that there are some changes that may need to be made. Let's take a quick look at some of these examples and why they fall under the "needed change" category.

Situation	Why Change is Needed	Possible Solutions
You're expecting twins and need to change the sleeping situation if bedsharing with your eldest.	When <i>two</i> more babies are coming, there is more preparation that needs to be made in all areas. For example, you can't have two babies and a toddler safely in a family bed.	There are a lot of areas that need to be looked at, but for something like sleep, it may be your eldest in their own bed in the same room or co-sleeping with the other partner.
New care for your child.	If you are going to start new care, it's best to start it early, whether it's with family, friends, or in a structured setting. Child care transitions can take a very long time for kids to adapt to (think months, not weeks or days) and so the more they have that time to adapt, the better it is.	If you can, work in just one day a week to start. Remember this is about building up attachment and trust between your eldest and the care worker(s). You also will need to be there more to help process this change and try to keep it as minimal as possible.
Weaning	This often doesn't need to happen, but for moms who are	If you can tolerate a bit, it's okay to limit nursing to a short time

	experiencing strong aversions during pregnancy, this can be a necessity.	each day. If you cannot, look at expressing and providing breast milk for your eldest or look at night weaning in a gentle way (something I have documents on if you are interested). You can also always explain that the boob will come back once the new baby arrives.
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So we have down that some changes may need to be made and focus only on those that are *absolutely necessary*. In almost all things parenting, stepping back and waiting to see what happens is a preferable route to jumping in without all information. Without changing too much, we allow our eldest to go on a journey with us towards welcoming their new sibling.

Section 1b: Talking About the New Baby

Let's face it - we almost all have a tendency to want to sugar-coat and hype up everything that our kids might not like. Broccoli? Didn't you know it's the most amazing!!! Daycare? You're going to have so *much fun!!!* New baby? This will be a wonderful addition and you'll love your new brother or sister so much!!!

We have to stop it. We go over the top because we want to convince our kids they should feel differently than they do and that's not fair to them. Maybe we do get them excited about this, but nothing we do this for is actually as exciting or fun as we make it out to be so eventually they end up realizing this and either think we're liars or untrustworthy. Not an ideal situation to be in.

Especially when it comes to a new baby.

The key to introducing the topic and talking to our kids about their new sibling is to allow their emotions to unfold naturally and simply be there for them. Some kids will get giddy excited about it and think it'll be the greatest thing ever. Some may burst into tears and think their life is over. Both reactions are entirely valid and probably not quite near the reality. But our kids won't know that until they've lived it and so we have to go through all the hypotheticals with them in the months leading up to this new arrival.

The reality for most older siblings is that they go through the ups and downs of thinking of all the little changes that will happen. Depending on their age and level of understanding, you may get more or less ups or downs, but even the most excited kid can start to come down when the pregnancy progresses and things they are used to start to change around them.

When talking to your child, I recommend keeping the following key points in mind:

Week 2: Sibling Bonds

1. Start with the simple facts about the arrival - changes can always come later. Explain what this means in simple terms, liken it to friends who have siblings for younger kids, and see how your child reacts.
2. Ask your child how they feel about it before offering your own feelings. No matter how excited or nervous you are, don't let your feelings guide your child's. Unfortunately we tend to start out with how excited we are and, depending on your child's temperament, that can make them feel they have to be excited too. When they feel this way, it makes it impossible for them to process whatever real emotion is underneath.
3. Acknowledge and empathize with all emotions. Whatever your child says is okay and your job is to acknowledge it, *not change it*. If your child is angry about it, don't try to talk them out of it, but rather empathize how hard this must feel for them. Your child needs to process these emotions before they can move beyond them.
4. As pregnancy progresses, start to mention some of the normal changes that will come from it while highlighting what won't change. For example, you will have a new car seat so sitting in the car may look different, baby will be coming everywhere with the family, sometimes Mom may need to rest and feed baby instead of play, etc. Bringing up concrete changes that are small helps your child process them ahead of time so don't be afraid to talk about some changes that may feel negative to your child because this is your time to help your child find ways of coping, like finding new games you guys can play while you're sitting there feeding a baby.

Some families report hearing violent thoughts from their child towards the new baby - either ahead of time or after birth - and this can be incredibly difficult to cope with. Our reaction is typically to want to squash that and say things like, "You don't mean that!" or "That's not okay!" I want to remind you all now that those feelings *are okay* because our kids don't really understand the concepts of forever death or harm and thus they may say things out of anger or hurt without thinking it through. In many ways, they *don't* mean that, but the emotion underneath is what is worth exploring with them. If we go to the defensive right away, we are telling them their underlying feelings are wrong instead of allowing them to explore them and learn new ways of expressing and coping with them.

If you find yourself in this situation, I recommend acknowledging it as normal and remembering that behind anger and violence is fear and threat. Your job is thus to get to the fear and threat that your child is experiencing. You may say something like, "Wow that sounds like you're really upset with the idea of a new baby. Can you tell me what would be so bad about a new baby?" If your child can answer, great, but if not, you need to first say it's okay they don't know and that you'll be there to love them and figure it out so hopefully whatever bad they worry about doesn't have to happen.

It's then up to you to focus your future discussions on the common fears and threats that many children have surrounding new siblings, including:

- Less love from parents
- Less time with parents
- Change in routines
- Change in the physical environment
- Sibling taking their toys or stuff
- Physical changes in Mom during pregnancy (especially if she's sick at the start or has any physical struggles)

These are all normal fears for a child to have and so you should make sure to take time to talk about each of them openly. As we talked about last week and I'll get to next (again), the worry about love is one of the biggest because how our kids perceive love is based on their current routine and time with us which is going to change. But so many of the things they fear can be taken down a notch or eliminated through talking it through, finding solutions together, and even practicing new changes. I remember when I was pregnant, the one thing my daughter desperately feared was losing our co-sleeping arrangement. She was not ready to move out of the bed and through talking to her about how that wasn't going to change at all, she was able to let go of that fear and embrace the positive of a new sibling. It doesn't mean there haven't been struggles, but each time we spoke about it honestly, she was able to move beyond them.

Section 1c: Shifting our Expression of Love

This is really a brief recap from last week because some of you in the preparation stage may think that this shift doesn't need to happen until after baby is born, but in reality, the sooner these other means of showing love increase, the easier that shift is after baby arrives. Remember that our children spell love T-I-M-E and this means this is a change that inevitably has to happen. There are the suggestions from last week in terms of offering up verbal expressions of love and doing things *for* our kids as well as making the one-on-one time special (which really should happen after baby arrives, not before), but there are also early ways to work on this change.

What I mean is that given the loss of love is a big fear kids have, we can start to prepare them for the change and remind them how much we love them even when time changes. Using simple games, we can get these points across to our kids. Talking with them means they can help come up with ways we can show our love when we can't be with them as they want. The following are a couple examples of games and conversations you can have over this:

- "I love you when..." Start with a conversation about how you love your child even when you aren't together and then go through all sorts of silly scenarios where you may be separated or you may be busy and ask if you love your child then. For example, "Do I love you when I'm in the bathroom? Do I love you if I go to the moon? Do I love you when I'm riding an elephant?"

Week 2: Sibling Bonds

As you play this throughout pregnancy, you can also start including events that will happen with the baby, like, “Do I love you if I’m holding the new baby?” If at any point, your child answers, “No” then it’s time to sit down and talk about how you do love them then and ask how they can know that (see next game).

- “How do you know I love you?” This is a good one because time is such a clear sign of love, but it’s not the only one. Ask your child how they know you love them and if all the answers are time (or if they’re too young to answer), then start to come up with other ways to demonstrate love. You could pick out something special for each of you to have to remind your child that you always love them or you could talk about the invisible string concept to help them understand (there’s a book on this, but in brief it is the idea that two people are connected by an invisible string that can not and will not break no matter where we are or what we are doing), but your child may have ideas as well so listen to them and come up with something together.

However you do it, just remember the crucial bit during this preparation stage is to ensure your child feels heard, validated, and loved.

Section 2: Getting to Know You



You've survived and now have a brand new baby home with you, or maybe that baby isn't a baby anymore and things aren't working out so well. Either way, the next crucial stage is the "getting to know you" stage. My favourite summary of what this process can feel like to a new toddler or child comes from the always-wonderful Pinky McKay when she writes:

"Imagine that your partner has just brought home a new lover and announced that you are all going to live together. It will be fun! You will be best friends! After hearing that your partner loves you and his new lover equally, you are asked to share all your things with this intruder. It also turns out that you won't be getting as much attention as you used to because the new lover is a bit upset about something. Anyway, you are such a clever person, you can do lots of things by yourself now. Oh, and by the way, you must be gentle with the new lover! Wouldn't go down too well, would it?"

I tend to liken this period of siblings getting to know each other to an arranged marriage. These two little people didn't pick each other to share a house, parents, toys, and life, but here they are, stuck together for the foreseeable future. Like marriage, they may find their groove, respect one another and end up in a happy relationship for the rest of their lives. They may also resent each other, feel unhappy in their lot, and drift away from each other as soon as they possibly can.

As parents, we want the former and many parents in today's society seem to think it's up to them to make sure their kids get along. Let's dispel that notion right away. You are *not wholly* responsible for their relationship, just as those who organize an arranged marriage aren't wholly responsible for the outcomes there either. So much depends on the temperaments and situations our kids find themselves in as to how that sibling relationship develops. And of course, like all relationships, there will be ups and

downs and sometimes the downs will take longer to get out of, and again, your job will not be to fix this for them.

But you do have some control and that's what I want to focus on here. That control that you have is basically in not doing things that would *facilitate* a negative relationship. Now none of us (hopefully) would do this on purpose, but sometimes when we think our job is to create this great relationship, we *inadvertently* do this. What we have to consider is what you *can* do to help this little relationship along. And by this, I really mean, just facilitating the potential for positive feelings between them because that's about all you get to do.

So let's take a look at some of the things people tend to do and what you can do instead:

DON'T	DO
<p>Play favourites.</p> <p>This shouldn't need to be said, but comparing kids early and seeming to have a favourite is a recipe for disaster. Sometimes it's not meant this way, but can come across this way to a child. For example, if you say something like, "Oh your brother is such a great sleeper - you were not though!" a child can interpret that to mean they weren't as good as their sibling and that causes distress.</p>	<p>Talk about how your eldest was as a baby.</p> <p>Making <i>positive</i> comparisons is good, it's the negative ones we want to avoid. Pointing out how your eldest liked to snuggle the same or also feed lots or anything that draws similarities between the two kids can be positive. This works because we do seem to have a bit of a "like me" bias as humans, but also because it's a reminder to our kids that we did all the same stuff with them and so baby isn't getting something they didn't get.</p>
<p>Suggest your eldest do things "for the baby".</p> <p>Remember that your eldest loves <i>you</i>, not this strange little creature, and so the more you ask your eldest to do things for this little bundle, the greater the chance for resentment and unhappiness.</p>	<p>Ask your child to help you when needed.</p> <p>Making your eldest an ally or partner with you and providing them lots of thanks when they do is a great way to help them feel loved and in partnership with you, but also lets them get to know baby in their own time. Importantly, take time to ask them to help even if you don't truly need their help and remember that help can be as easy as "can you keep me company while I feed baby?"</p>
<p>Say baby is the reason for any problem.</p>	<p>Take ownership of the problems that come up</p>

<p>Yes, you may be too tired to play because your baby was up all night, but in the eyes of your eldest, you can do no wrong. This means that blame will fall squarely on the head of your newborn and build up that early anger and resentment.</p>	<p>You will need to be the one to own the issues fully and know that your child may get somewhat mad at you at times, but that this is the way to help facilitate the relationship with their sibling. Further, when we own it, we often then start to think about ways we can make amends if needs be which is incredibly powerful for our relationship with our kids.</p>
<p>Try to change or ignore the negative emotions.</p> <p>It's completely valid to have negative emotions around a new sibling. Life is upended and sometimes it's really, really hard to adapt. In these moments, we can sometimes try to convince our kids that they really do love their sibling when they say they hate them, but this just serves to invalidate your eldest's experience. And when we do this, we definitely don't get them thinking they care, but rather reinforce the reasons they don't.</p>	<p>Validate and accept the negative emotions.</p> <p>Because these emotions are real, we can do nothing except validate them for our kids. This doesn't mean accepting acting out on them or even suggesting our kids <i>should</i> feel this way, but definitely letting them know they can feel that way and we all do sometimes can go a long way to helping.</p> <p>I often recommend parents take these times to relate their own experiences in feeling similarly. If you had a sibling, you can talk about the upset you had sometimes, but also the love. By linking your experience to theirs, you not only normalize it (which keeps them from feeling shame over it), but you also provide a way to move beyond the negative by talking about how you did it.</p>

In all of these situations, if you think to Pinky's wonderful example on welcoming a new lover, I'm sure you can imagine how you'd feel if it were you being compared to, asked to do things, or lose time with your partner over this new person. Not great, eh? But when we focus on letting our kids get to know each other in time - good and bad - there is a greater chance that they can find their own groove and love for one another.

One final note in this "getting to know you" period comes from concerns many kids have. They logically worry that you will have less room in your heart for them. Older kids especially may wonder because practically speaking, items don't just grow because they need to. A cup only carries so much water, it doesn't matter how much water there is. Thus to make room for loving a sibling means giving up some love that's already there. In these cases (even if you just *suspect* your child may feel this way), it's good

Week 2: Sibling Bonds

to talk about love and how it resides in the body as something that grows with every new person we care for.

If your child has friends, you can liken it to their ability to like new people and make new friends. You can also liken it to toys as they often are quite happy to get new toys without having to give up a current favourite. Putting this concept into child-like concepts helps them better understand that your love isn't changing because you also love this new sibling.

With all this, you hopefully make it through this friendship-building stage (or even later stage if you're starting at a more difficult place) with only a few bumps along the way, but that doesn't mean you aren't going to get your fair share of jealousy. How do we handle these in a way that keeps the sibling bond strong? Let's see.

Section 3: Jealousy



Okay I think it's time now to talk about a little-discussed fact about us humans: We suck at understanding what's "fair", at least in our Western culture. We tend to overestimate when we are given the short end of the stick and underestimate when others are in such a position. This is pretty normal for an individualist culture because our focus remains on ourselves, not others.

Young children can be particularly egocentric through no fault of their own, but due to the fact that they haven't developed specific social-cognitive skills that enable us to think about others. For example, theory of mind is the term given to our ability to think about other people's mental states and although the very beginnings of this emerge around 18 months - when kids are able to identify that other people have preferences different to their own - the more developed theory of mind doesn't emerge until age 5. This lack of theory of mind means we overestimate what others think as being closer to what we believe rather than thinking there could be a different perspective. If we think about this in terms of what it means for how our kids experience new siblings, the moment they feel that we may not love them as much or that their sibling is taking over, the ability to appreciate a different perspective is harder to come by.

In addition, like all humans, when we face distressing or upsetting situations, we are more likely to focus inward than outward. This leads us to become more egocentric and ignore the plight of others. Think about when you last felt highly stressed out about anything - work, school, parenting, relationships - and think about how much you were able to think of others at that time over your own sense of distress. It probably wasn't very much. If we think about this in terms of welcoming a new sibling, the stress or anxiety our kids feel about this means they are less likely to even consider the well-being or existence of this other tiny human, much less prioritize the needs of this baby over having things as they are used to.

If our kids feel that the new sibling is usurping their position or taking a parent away from them, they are going to do what comes naturally - be jealous and get upset because it really is all about them. This doesn't make them "right" in how they think about this, but there's really no point in thinking in terms of "right" and "wrong" when it comes to these strong emotional states. Our emotional reactions are rarely logical and thus when we try to apply logic to them - like explaining the reality of what baby needs - we are missing the point entirely. Unless you're a Buddhist master, reason rarely beats strong emotions.

So how do we handle these strong emotions and the jealousy that creeps up both early and later between our children?

We have to start with *empathy* for the child that is feeling the jealousy. No matter how irrational or even unfair the jealousy can seem, if we cannot empathize with our child's plight, we will fail to help them resolve it and learn from it. Empathy does not always come easy for us, especially when we ourselves are feeling overwhelmed and - ahem - focused on our own distress or stressful circumstances (such as when we have an older child acting out while we're trying to care for a new baby). In order to help remind us and build our empathy, you may want to keep some handy reminders visible for you. I have seen families who have quotes up around their house to remind them of such things so when they face that struggle that often leads them to focus on their distress, they are reminded of the distress of someone they love dearly. Some examples of these quotes include:

"My child is not giving me a hard time, my child is having a hard time."

"My child's behaviour is an expression of how s/he feels on the inside."

"Our job is to share our calm, not join their chaos" - L.R. Knost

When we remember these, we are better able to empathize with where our child is at and work to help them through the difficult time. Or at least just be there for them.

The second element is *connection*. Arguably everything comes down to connection which is why the ways of expressing love is so important. In our house, we talk about how we all have love wells associated with each other individual in the house, so I have a well for each of my kids and my husband. It's probably not too surprising that the one that feels low a lot of the time is the one for my husband, but we work on that! But my kids have wells for each of us and each other. When they act out, especially against each other, we know it's almost always an issue with one of the wells being dry. Sometimes that well is with one of us adults, but sometimes it's the well they have for each other.

In the case of new siblings, it's inevitably the well for at least one of the parents. This means that our focus is not on repairing whatever rift we see *between* our kids (generally by trying to convince the eldest to accept the youngest), but upon the connection to us. This means that you have to try to find a way - as soon as possible - to rebuild that connection. Often our kids can start to come out of their difficult place if we identify a concrete time and event that will lead to this connection; for example,

suggesting reading a favourite book together after baby falls asleep or when someone else arrives to care for baby. Vague notions of connection will not work so please be as specific as you can be.

In addition to actually connecting, this is a great way to help your eldest identify that the issue *isn't* with their sibling, but rather with the lack of time with a parent. The best way to do this is a subtle way in which you simply note what is going on and provide the explanation that involves this well being dry. Something like, "I can see you're having a really hard time right now and are feeling really angry. I know it's hard when we don't get as much time together as we used to - when we miss out on that time, it can make us feel bad inside. Let's make a deal: As soon as baby falls asleep, you and I will read our special book together and snuggle. How does that sound?"

What you've done here is to identify the emotions, empathized with them, but nowhere have you placed the cause of the emotions on baby - *even if your eldest has already done this* - instead you've shifted towards putting the cause where it ought to be: on the lack of connection. By doing this you also get to rectify the situation by providing a solution that builds on this need for connection.

Despite the importance of connection in the moment, you also want to be *proactive* in avoiding jealousy and so the third element here is *perspective-taking*. There is a wealth of research from children and adults that finds that the more we are able to take the perspective of another, the greater our empathy for and understanding of them is. As discussed earlier, full perspective-taking is really hard for kids, but they can develop these skills as the brilliant Roots of Empathy program has shown us time and again.

For those unaware of this program, it involves mothers of newborns bringing their baby in once a month to a classroom of young kids to let the children see the baby and they talk about all the things the baby can and can't do and how that might feel. As kids realize how helpless the babies are, it not only builds empathy for the baby, but for others in the classroom as well. Now obviously these children are older and have some of the theory of mind skills to build upon, but with our younger kids, we can still point out the various things they do that their sibling doesn't (no matter the age). When they are able to see that they can walk, for example, but the baby cannot, you ask them how baby gets around and they can start to understand why you're carrying baby so much. This can help the feelings move from resentment towards an understanding, even if not full acceptance.

The fourth element, closely related to perspective-taking, is *building similarity*. Not only do we empathize with people we understand more, we empathize with and like people that are more "like us". I will not get into the very contentious research on inherent racism or anything like that because that's not necessarily what "like us" is for kids (although this is an excellent area of research to look into if you're interested - filled with more questions than answers though). What I will build upon is the findings that when we elicit people to think in terms of similarities, these prosocial behaviours increase.

For our children, there are a few things you can do that help build this up:

1. Create a book of your eldest as a baby (or younger child if your second is older) for them to see. Seeing pictures of them as a baby - similar to what they see in their sibling - reminds them how

much they were like this little creature next to them. It reminds them how much you cared for them when they were little.

2. Make positive connections between your two kids. Take time daily to talk about the areas they are similar and how they may also be different, but both positive. These don't need to be big similarities, just things that they can observe and then see themselves in because you've told them it's there.
3. Ask your eldest if they think baby will learn new things like they did. For example, if you have a young second, you may ask, "Do you think baby will learn to walk like you did?" Of course you know the answer, but it helps to remind your eldest that this baby will grow and change too and not necessarily need so much of the parents. These leading questions can also bring your eldest to the stage where they see a role for themselves in learning how to help and that can engender positive feelings for baby.
4. If your eldest is old enough to understand, at times when their little sibling is bothering them you can point out how they did similar things at the same age. Tell them how it's not about anyone being "bad", but rather that baby is just developmentally not there, but will get there just as your eldest did. This can help calm them when they are upset over any perceived slight.

Finally, point out the *love from the younger to the elder sibling*. When we know someone loves us, we are kinder to them and more tolerant. We don't want to push this on our kids and just like how they see our love as coming through concrete means, we have to be on the lookout to provide those moments for our eldest with their younger sibling. When the youngest smiles at the eldest, you can take a moment to say something like, "Oh wow - he sure loves you by the way he's smiling at you!" Or if he's just holding baby, you can say something like, "He's so comfortable with you, he must feel so loved." These smaller moments will build towards more positive outcomes and feelings which are the foundation of the longer-term relationship.

Now, you may have noticed that these areas are generally for jealousy from the eldest, but sometimes it's our youngest that get jealous, especially as they get older. Please know that the same principles apply above for our youngest kids, but there are a few areas that need specific attention:

1. Jealousy over skills. Our youngest sometimes get jealous because their older siblings can do things they can't, like ride a bike or make something out of blocks or even paint or colour nicely. This can lead to destruction at all levels and it's often very hard for our eldest to handle this type of anger directed at them for things they have no control over, or should actually be proud of. In these instances, it's best to allow your youngest to get those big emotions out and then - if they are capable - talk about how they will get there too as they get older. Use similarity to point out that their sibling couldn't do it at their age either. You may need also to set up safe spaces for your eldest to take part in activities that could get destroyed.

2. Jealousy over time. Young kids love other kids and often younger siblings just want to be with the elder ones *all the time*. This does not mean that feeling is reciprocated all the time. In fact, I'm going to bet it's not (especially if they have friends over which adds a whole other layer). In these cases, it can feel like rejection to the youngest who doesn't understand why this amazing older person doesn't want to be with them and when they feel this way, they lash out. I'll be talking about the violence that can come in sibling relationships next week, but in these moments of jealousy, the key is to remember that our job isn't to repair that element, but to help build understanding and support. This means that we can empathize with our younger child - and older child who wants space - and be there to help them through those negative emotions instead of trying to change them. Then when they are calm, we can point out we'd like to be with them and maybe we can even point out times when they like playing by themselves too.
3. Jealousy over toys/items. Let's face it, older kid toys/items are sometimes cooler and our youngest kids want them, but can't have them. Remote control cars, nicer dolls, small legos, fragile books, and so on - they are the temptresses of the young child. I often remind adults about how it's their job to keep their things away from their young kids to keep it safe, but with siblings, it's *much, much* harder. They struggle because they too want to be with us and play with us and they want their things there with them because they love them too. Some families just focus on getting something similar for the younger child, but this often doesn't work because there's always something about someone else's stuff that is that much better.

This leaves three outcomes that you have to prepare for. The first is the best, but least likely, in that it involves your eldest listening to you about keeping things safe and using these special items away from their younger sibling. A lovely state of affairs if you can make it happen, but generally doesn't work. The second is when the eldest doesn't listen, brings stuff in, and you have to keep your youngest from destroying things and the youngest gets highly upset by the matter. In these cases I recommend focusing your attention on how hard it is for them and how much you love them and remember - again - that your job isn't to fix their issues, but to help them feel better. The third option is when the youngest gets ahold of something of the eldest and destroys it. This can lead to strong distress and intense anger for our eldest that gets put on our youngest. Sometimes we get angry at our eldest for being so upset, but really the only response is empathy again. No, "I warned you!" or "It's not your sibling's fault!", just "I'm so very sorry that happened, you must feel awful and I'm here for you." That's it.

4. Jealousy over parents. Just as our eldest get jealous over the time with us when we have a newborn, as our younger kids age, they too become possessive and jealous over any time spent away from them. This can lead to some of the strongest feelings and some of the hardest for us as we are pulled in all directions. Making sure you have one-on-one time with both kids is helpful when you can make it happen (and make it special), but more group activities can also be helpful. The key is not to make a show of the time with one child in front of the other,

Week 2: Sibling Bonds

especially if the other is engaged. When this jealousy pops up, you'll need to make a plan for when you will spend that special time with your youngest, but depending on their age, you may need to make that time now and reschedule with your eldest, as unfair as that can seem.

No matter who is jealous or what the reason is, we have to know that at the root comes our feelings about ourselves. We get jealous because we worry someone loves someone else more, or because they are better than us, or have more than us, and so on. If we can always look through the periods of sibling jealousy as being more about how our kids are feeling about *themselves* in the moment, the easier it will be for us to address these issues with them in a calm and loving manner.

Now it's one thing to handle jealous *feelings* and the cries and yells that can come with that, but what about when our kids go violent? That brings about a whole new level of triggers that many parents didn't know they had in them and that is part of what we will talk about next week when we focus on the house of cards that our households can seem like, especially as those sibling fights can easily bring down the whole house.

Bonus Section: Playing Favourites with Parents



This isn't quite to do with the *sibling* relationship, but rather the relationships our children have with us, the parents. For single parents out there, this section won't be as relevant because you will always be that favourite, but when there are two of you, kids can start to prefer one parent over the other and this can lead to a different type of jealousy - adult jealousy.

Let me start by saying that it is 100% normal for kids to prefer one parent over another and that this parent will often be whoever is spending the most time with them at the moment. The problem for many adults is that kids do not have the awareness nor tact to display this in the kindest of ways. They don't walk up to their parents and say, "Well, I prefer being with X right now even though I love you both". No, they say things like, "I only love X! Go away Y!"

Needless to say, it's not exactly the most welcoming words that fill hearts with love and happiness.

The problems come when the parent who gets the short end of the stick gets upset with the other parent for not intervening appropriately in these situations. What this adult wants is often some reprimand or correction to what the child has expressed so that *they* can feel better about themselves in this relationship. They seem to feel that this should come from the other parent who, at the moment, is the favourite. The other parent often feels it is up to the short-stick parent to just work harder to make that relationship better.

How do we deal with this without sabotaging the parent relationship?

First, everyone must realize that these comments are not a reflection of how "good" each parent is, but just that level of familiarity and awareness of our kids' needs. When children spend lots of time with

Week 2: Sibling Bonds

one parent, that parent gets to know the ins and outs of what makes them happy and comfortable and that fluidity is what helps the overall relationship. (As an aside, I find in many relationships one parent is a bit better at perspective-taking than the other and that parent is often the favourite because the ease of which they can predict their child's reactions and needs. If parents want to work on any skill in terms of building their relationships, it would be perspective-taking.)

Second, one should never reprimand a child for expressing how they feel or tell them that isn't how they feel. Kids need to be comfortable saying anything and everything to us as adults. In the long run, that's what keeps them safe so always remember that if you want your teen to talk to you about stuff, you have to let your young child talk about whatever without shame.

Now, this doesn't mean we do *nothing*. We have to understand that often these blanket statements come from a child's perspective which is often limited. That is, they see things in more black and white terms than us adults which means when they make grand statements about only loving one person, it's often because they think that's how it goes - you love one, not two - just as they want us to love them and no one else. (When we think about adult relationships in this way, we can see why this type of thinking can be so easy for our kids to come by.)

In trying to get our kids to think about things a little differently, it's more effective to play games listing all the people we love or the things about each person in the family we love than trying to tell them they don't feel that way or that they are wrong for expressing it. In fact, one of the best things the short-stick parent can do is to empathize with the child about how much they all love the other parent. As mentioned earlier with siblings, building similarity is a great way to build connection and what better similarity than loving the other parent?

Finally, I just want to remind all parents that it's okay to have hurt feelings. Our kids can be brutal in what they say to us. They can tell us we're fat, we're mean, they hate us, they'll throw us out a window, and so on. When you worry about this or feel like something is "wrong" with your kids or your relationship with them, I ask you to do the following: Take a day and note every little thought about people that bother you that comes to mind, but you know better than to say. Every mean thought when your child is screaming at you or your partner is annoying you. Every judgmental thought you have about people you know. I am going to guess that for most of us, there will be similarities in what we've written down and to what our kids actually say. The difference is that as adults we know these thoughts come - without our control - and we can reason through why we might experience these thoughts and know we don't mean them and thus don't say them. Our kids - with their immature neurological development - don't. So they say everything that comes to mind.

It's one of those cases where we truly can say, it's not you, it's them. And they still love you anyway.

This is the end of Parenting 2.0 - Week 2 - Sibling Bonds