

Biological warfare

From constructive conversation and intelligent debate to full-scale screaming and name-calling, Big on Children's Super Granny, **Andalene Salvesen**, helps channel healthy sibling rivalry



A psychologist would describe sibling rivalry as the jealousy, competition and fighting between brothers and sisters. Nine out of 10 mums and dads would probably go for 'biological warfare, potentially spiking murderous tendencies'. Especially around dinner time.

Mother-of-four, grandmother-of-nine, parenting coach and author Andalene Salvesen says there are seven ways to deal with sibling rivalry.

1 Pecking order

It is often the case that older children have more responsibilities (because we expect more from them) but rarely have more privileges. Put them "in charge" of making decisions and getting certain privileges, for example, allowing them to go to bed 15 minutes later; or deciding who gets to bath first, who sits where, or which DVD to watch. They will love the responsibility.

This can however *only* be allowed if their attitudes are right – otherwise these privileges are to be assigned to the younger sibling/s for the day.

2 Fighting

It takes two to fight, so each child is to take responsibility for their contribution to a fight. Never ask "what happened?", but rather ask "what did you do that you shouldn't have?" They may, in other words, not start their sentence with "he" or "she".

3 The curse of comparison

Never compare children (for instance: "this is my sporty one" or "smart" or "pretty" or "intelligent" child). Each child is unique and special and should be treated as such. They

need to feel that there is nothing they can or cannot do that will make you love them any more or any less, and that they are loved for their uniqueness. However, this does not mean you will accept non-negotiable behaviour.

4 Avoid favouritism

Never have favourites. It's easy to respond to the "sunshine child" with a smile and revert to a more sombre response when it comes to the introvert. Children pick up on this. Sometimes there may also be more conflict with the one that reflects your own personality traits more strongly. This is probably because you see yourself in them and you don't always like what you see, because it reminds you of your own weaknesses (like stubbornness or impatience). Treat all children as equal.





Arguing vs debating

Before tackling the sometimes family-shattering and exhausting issue of sibling rivalry, it first makes sense to understand the biggest difference between arguing and debating is an attitude. Arguing is not letting go of a point, trying to prove you are right and the other is wrong. Debating is questioning and being open to hear the other person's point of view.

Arguing usually erupts into an unreasonable fight, where debating can be channelled correctly. Kids should be encouraged to stand up for their rights but within acceptable parameters. Help them approach potential disagreements using these eight tips:

1. Stand up for what you believe is right
2. Do not give in to injustice
3. Do not mistreat anyone, or allow anyone else to be mistreated either
4. Have an assertive attitude – one that shows “you don’t want to mess with me!”
5. No shouting
6. No hurting or hitting
7. No swearing
8. No calling names



MEET THE AUTHOR

Andalene travels the world as a speaker and parenting coach. She is the author of *A Brand New Child in 5 Easy Steps*, as well as co-author of *Raising Happy, Healthy Children*. Read more at supergranny.acuityscheduling.com and follow Andalene on Twitter at @SuperGrannySA or at facebook.com/Munchkins.me

a useful tip

Try having staggered bed times to read stories alone with each child before bed; or setting a weekly/monthly date with each child that will be their time alone to do something with you (e.g. every Thursday from 3pm-4pm is our time to play and bond).

5 Schedule alone time

Schedule positive time alone with each child (even if they are only 10 months apart in age). They need to be treated differently and, for example, may need to be read a story on a different level. It's very important.

6 Consider different tempers

Try to understand their unique temperaments and respond accordingly. Introverts need time alone to energise, so give them chill time, whereas extroverts need to learn that they will survive when they play alone. It's important children are encouraged to explore their personalities.

7 Family time bonding

Teach your children to be happy with those that are happy and sad with those that are sad. Play board games and teach them how to lose graciously. Point out good sportsmanship on TV, especially when losers commend their opponents.