

JANUARY 2017

DEAR DR. ROBYN

EMPATHY



Young students: "I can imagine how you feel!"

Older students/teens/adults: "Reading, understanding and responding to other people's feelings."

Dear Dr. Robyn,

Some days, I feel like sibling rivalry was invented in my house. My kids can be mean to each other. I tell them that they wouldn't like it if the situation was in reverse but it doesn't make any difference. How can I get them to realize that how their siblings feel, matters?

Jennifer M; Newark, OH

Dear Jennifer,

Sibling rivalry is part of many households-- you are not alone! Siblings feel safe with one another and know that the love between them will endure fights, frustration and hurt feelings- so they let it all out! Sibling rivalry is also often seen as a cry for attention-- children know parents will pay attention when the kids are arguing.

What else? Sibling rivalry let's off stress and results in some feelings of satisfaction when one sibling gets the other "into trouble." We see it everywhere! This doesn't make it right, of course, it just makes it common.

Here are some ways to make your children more aware of each other's feelings:

(1) Work on "I feel" statements: Encourage each child to have a moment where s/he can give an

"I feel" statement and a moment where s/he listens to his/her sibling say an "I feel" statement. It will sound like this: "I feel _____ because/when _____."

(2) Reiterate what was heard:

You, as the parent, can either reiterate what YOU heard or, if your children are old enough, have each child reiterate what they heard his/her sibling say. For instance, "Ty feels sad when I leave him out" or "Claire feels angry when I go into her room without knocking." Once feelings are stated, ask your children; "how can you work out this problem so we can move forward?"

(3) Turn it around: When your children see others interacting in everyday life or when conflict just starts in your home, ask your children, "how do you think _____ feels right now? Or, "if you were in his/her shoes, how would you feel right now?" Perspective-taking takes training!

**POWERFUL
WORDS**
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

<< Paraphrased from a message; with permission

(4) Praise it when you see it: Catch your children using empathy and let them know you noticed. Allow them to get attention for making empathetic rather than antagonistic choices!

Lastly, make empathy a common practice inside and outside of your home. You can even use media and everyday occurrences as springboards for discussion!

Here's to your success!

