

## Sibling Rivalry or Parental Negligence

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### ABSTRACT

*The relation of a brothers and sisters is considered to be one of the most long lasting and beautiful of all. With the change in time, it has been re shaped and has formed altogether a new form which is comprises of jealousy, competition and comparison which creates sibling rivalry. The paper analyses the causes behind the sibling rivalry, the positive side of sibling rivalry and various techniques have been suggested in order to deal with sibling rivalry. If dealt nicely, the relationship of a sibling can be found beautiful and nurturing throughout the lifetime, both during childhood as well as during the time of maturity.*

**Keywords:** Sibling, Rivalry, Parents, Comparison, Competition.

### INTRODUCTION:

A family is considered complete only when it has at least two kids. As the family increases its number of members through kids, siblings are formed and there arises sibling rivalry. Sibling rivalry is a type of competition or animosity among siblings, even if they are not related through blood with each other. The siblings tend to spend more time together than with their parents, thus their bond is influenced by parental treatment, birth order, personality and experiences outside the family. Intense sibling rivalry is found in case of children who are very close in age, same gender, intellectually gifted. Sibling rivalry is the jealousy, competition and fighting between brothers and sisters. This rivalry continues throughout their childhood making the situation more frustrating and stressful for the parents. The bond of siblings is entirely different from other relationships which helps in shaping personalities from childhood to adulthood. Communication is the base of having a strong relationship, a poor communication make this relationship suffer to a great extent. During childhood, the maximum amount of time is spent among siblings and as soon as they become adult, a bond is created in few cases whereas in most of the cases this relationship is taken for granted. But with the changing time, it is found these days that the sibling bond and relationship is losing its charm. A new phase which has emerged in this relationship is sibling rivalry. It is the jealousy, attention seeking behavior or insecurity of a child towards their relationship with their sibling. There can be various reasons behind the same but mainly it is dependent upon the upbringing of the child and atmosphere at home.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Sibling relationships are characterised by their durability as it is one of the longest lasting relationships in an individual's lifetime which makes it quite unique as the siblings share their background, experiences and family (White, 2001). It is suggested that the interaction between siblings may be influenced by their perception of the relationship (Stocker et. al., 1997). The relationship is not just influenced by the siblings themselves but may also be affected by other people, situations and circumstances (Furman and Lanthier, 1996; Stoneman and Brody, 1993). Within the same family, one individual might get on better with one or more siblings than another. The sibling relationship has, for the most part, been ignored by researchers until the 1980s (Dunn, 2002). Even though it is a complex relationship, it can be a great source of friendship and support (Connidis and

Davies, 1990; O'Bryant, 1988) but it can also be a source of rivalry, conflict or ambivalence (Allan, 1977; Bedford, 1998; Connidis, 2007). It has been suggested that the sibling relationship is perhaps one of the most longlasting and enduring relationships of an individual's life (Allan, 1977; Cicirelli, 1980; Lee, 1990; Voorpostel et al., 2007; White, 2001). The role of the sibling is a dynamic one which may change over the course of the lifespan from being playmate, caretaker, friend, and rival before becoming more egalitarian and an important source of support and solidarity (Cicirelli, 1994; Connidis, 2007; Voorpostel et al., 2007). Parsons (1943) suggested that kin relationships can be described as groups of "nested circles". During childhood siblings are generally to be found in the "inner circle" but this may change as they age with their life circumstances changing, causing them to move to the outer circles (White and Riedmann, 1992). (Stocker et. al., 1997) found that the number of children in a family and rivalry are positively correlated whereas it is negatively correlated with warmth, which, they suggest, may be due to the fact that children of larger families may have experienced limited resources in terms of love and attention, thereby increasing their rivalry and reducing the warmth between siblings. Research by (Updegraff et. al. 2005) shows that aggression in the sibling relationships is negatively correlated to lower emotional support in this relationship. It is suggested that individual adjustment may be affected by relational aggression in the sibling relationship as indirect and manipulative methods are used which may result in isolation of one sibling and lead to limited access to appropriate peer relationships (Soli, McHale and Feinberg, 2009).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

### **Need of the Study:**

With the changing time, it is the need of the hour to understand the sibling relation and make efforts to cope up with the rivalry so being emerged among them. Efforts have been made to study the various reasons of sibling rivalry to help the parents understand the likelihood of emergence of rivalry among siblings so that this relationship is nurtured and flourishes and does not get spoiled due to the ignorance or negligibility.

### **Scope of the Study:**

The study is carried to examine the reasons behind sibling rivalry, types of sibling rivalry and the major causes of the same. The suggestions have been made for the parents about the manner in which it can be rightly dealt with. Furthermore, the positive aspect of sibling rivalry is also discussed.

### **Source of Data:**

The data has been collected from various secondary sources including newspapers, magazines, journals and articles etc.

### **Discussion:**

Sibling rivalry as discussed earlier can be there in relationships which are not related through blood with each other also. Thus, there are different types sibling rivalry which are discussed as under:

### **The different forms of sibling rivalry:**

There are different types of behavioral sibling rivalry so found in siblings. Here are just a few of the ways that children can provoke one another:

- Name-calling,
- Blaming,
- Poking,
- Stealing things,
- Lying,
- Challenging a belief,
- Arguing,
- Simply looking at each other,
- Tattling,
- Breaking something that belongs to the other one,
- Hitting,
- Throwing something at the other one,
- Hiding something that is important to the other one.

These might sound to be very normal for few parents but for few they might get on their nerves but there is a way of handling such rivalry issues. These may sound very normal or routine activities but these should not be ignored.

There are various reasons which instigate rivalry among siblings and can be a reason behind sourness in relationships and need to be carefully watched.

- 1) **Jealousy:** The main reason behind sibling rivalry is jealousy. Sometimes, the performance or the looks of the other or achievement causes jealousy among the siblings. Whatever a person wants to get but is not able to get and the sibling gets it, it becomes a reason of jealousy among sibling and it becomes quite visible in their behavior as well.
- 2) **Competition:** A competition may be healthy or unhealthy one. A healthy competition encourages the other sibling to grow or progress in life while a competition with jealousy never takes them anywhere. The unhealthy competition or a competition accompanied by jealousy only brings hatred in the relationship of siblings.
- 3) **Parental praise:** At times, parents unknowingly praise one child more than the other due to the achievement or obedience or at times sue to the good behavior shown by the child but this arouses a sense of insecurity and jealousy among the other child. The child starts feeling insecure and tends to distance oneself from the sibling.
- 4) **Unequal treatment:** Parents always love their children equally but sometimes due to certain upbringing or atmosphere at home, a child starts feeling left out or dejected. Parental inclination towards one child and unintentionally ignoring the other brings sourness in their relationship and makes their relationship suffer to a huge extent and such a feeling never disappear even with time and continues till adulthood also.
- 5) **Birth order:** Many researches in the past shows that the different birth orders carries different response pattern due to the different experience siblings in different birth orders in their families.
  - i. **First borns:** The first born child tend to identify closely with the parent who makes more of the decisions in the family, is more proactive, and task-oriented (traditionally the father). First-borns are interested in results and productivity, need to feel on target and tend to be perfectionist, reliable, responsible, well organized, and serious.
  - ii. **Second borns/ middles:** The middles tend to identify closely with more expressive and emotional parent (traditionally the mother). They are interested in the quality of performance and tend to be in tune with people's emotions. Feeling that they 'belong' is very important to them. They often function as mediators, avoid conflict, are independent, extremely loyal to their peer group, have many friends, and are more likely to be a maverick.
  - iii. **Third borns:** They tend to relate to pairs in the family (eg.: two parents, two siblings etc.). They are interested in maintaining balance in relationships between people, need to have choices and tend to use humor in dealing with situations. They are interested in family harmony and are more tuned with the emotions of the individuals in the family and the family as a group. But at the same time, they can be more manipulative, fear taking responsibility of their actions, frequently charming, engaging and more into show offs.

Each birth order has its own advantages and disadvantages. But at times the birth order may become a reason of complain in children. Also, sometimes, the position of a sibling in a family impacts how a parent relate to their own children. Eg.: a mother may not be sympathetic with an oldest child if she felt that her older sister had more privileges and was more favoured during her childhood. In a blended family, as a new child enters into the family, the elder one may find herself to be the middle child which further affects the sibling relationships.

- 6) **Spacing among siblings:** The siblings who are close in age have high access to one another whereas the siblings who are spaced further apart have less access to one another and tend to be less competitive because they usually spend less time together, are interested in different things, and are involved in different activities.
- 7) **Temperament differences:** Siblings who are temperamentally "easy" may be treated differently by parents ,they are more liked by their parents than siblings who are "more challenging". Children with more challenging temperaments may annoy their siblings (and parents) more. If the differences in the manner in which parents react to their children exists, then the intensity of competition between the children also increases
- 8) **Gender:** In certain families, specially India, there are preferences of having the child of a particular gender. So, if the child of the child of less preferred gender is born, that that child may grow up the recipient of such

messages as “we wish you were a boy” instead of a girl. Such messages influences how that child relates to her other siblings and can increase sibling rivalry, especially with the child who is the more desired gender.

**9) Parenting style and family ambiance:** Different parental approaches ranging from very aggressive and harsh to very permissive and overly relaxed. In such cases, the children so raised in such families tend to fight more. When the parents are very strict, rigid, and use overly harsh discipline or corporal punishment, the children tend to fight more with siblings when they can get away with it because aggression has been modeled for them. At the same time, children raised in very permissive homes feel neglected and don't have rules to guide their behavior, so they tend also to fight more. The best family upbringing is found to be in the middle of these two extremes as the children raised in such families are found to impact the children's relationships with one another; there will be less need to compete or to fight for love, attention and respect, or to prove their worth by denigrating a brother or sister. The reason is that such families:

- Respect individual needs
- Treat children as unique and special people,
- Foster cooperation rather than competition,
- Encourage a positive and loving connection to the family.

**10) Family circumstances:** The circumstances at home may be same for every child but differences in the circumstances can alter their experiences. Factors such as the finances of the family at any given time, which parents worked and when, who was in charge of the children, where the family lived, and the nature of the parents' relationship at the time each sibling was growing up. All of these can impact the children's relationships.

Instead of losing the temper, the parents need to understand that there might be few reasons behind the regular fights of their children. The reasons behind the fights between siblings are as under:

- In order to get attention from parents
- They feel powerful
- Annoying a sibling excites the child and they are able to break the boredom
- Connect with their sibling
- To become a “favoured one” in the eyes of their parents by making the other sibling look bad
- Get physical contact.

## **POSITIVE SIDE OF SIBLING RIVALRY:**

### **What children learn from the fighting:**

In addition, children actually do learn important life skills through the arguing they do with their siblings. They learn to:

- Deal with power struggles
- Manage conflict and resolve differences
- Be assertive and to stand up for their position
- Negotiate and compromise
- They will learn what is right and wrong
- A bond is created among the siblings
- Learn to share
- Develop a habit of accepting things even if they don't like
- A healthy competition will be developed which will help them excel more

## **BEST WAYS TO DEAL WITH SIBLING RIVALRY:**

The sibling rivalry is mainly caused due to the atmosphere at home or the parental behavior towards their kids. So if parents wish to avoid the stress of sibling rivalry, they need to focus on few mistakes which they incur knowingly or unknowingly:

**1) Stop comparing:** Even if there are two children or more than two in a family, it is the responsibility of the parents to treat them equally. No matter how good one child is performing, a comparison should not be made with another. Every child is different and has a different intellect and caliber and parents need to understand that and appreciate it. Their comparison will only create differences among them and a feeling of jealousy shall be arisen.

- 2) **Planning activities together:** In order to create a bond among kids it is very important for them to have an outing together. Parents must make some outing plans together and some fun activities together. This will help the children develop and grow together.
- 3) **Giving individual attention:** The children need to understand that they are their children only and they must give individual personal attention to all of them. Without being partial to any of them and gender biased too.
- 4) **Teach the kids emotional intelligence:** The parents should strive to teach the children emotions, value of relations, love and negotiation skills. The parents should also encourage them to look for win-win solutions, parents can help children resolve conflicts that arise as a normal part of growing up together in the same household. The children must be encouraged to look for a win- win solution.
- 5) **Birth order:** The knowledge of birth order should be used in order to understand the position of each children's position and feelings. Their position should rather be used in an advantageous role, eg.: elder child should be asked to give opinion and take care of the little one at the same time. This can make the elder one feel more responsible and will help in developing a fatherly / motherly role and the younger one will be able to develop a bond with the sibling.
- 6) **Better understanding:** Consider the other factors that influence the sibling relationship so that parents should be more understanding about the children's experiences and perhaps use this knowledge to mitigate the rivalry.
- 7) **Patience:** Parents need to stay hopeful and optimistic and need to remember that the sibling rivalry is inevitable and will forego as the children will grow mature. This rivalry will subside and children will learn ways to handle conflicts on their own.

## CONCLUSION:

Sibling rivalry is a very common thing which happens between children of any age and any household and there is nothing unusual about it. Rather than panicking in this particular situation, there is a need to handle the situation tactfully. There is a major role played by the parents in helping the children value and nurture every relationship and bond. They should be set free to enjoy the childhood and at the same time they should be taught the true value of having a sibling. There are many positive aspects also which are associated with siblings and the rivalry they have. Each and every situation and phase has its own pros and cons and parents also need to understand that the children must be aware of the facts that there can be difficult situations in their lives and they should know how to handle them.

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