

Parenting Challenges facing Muslims Today

Week 2: Dealing with Sibling Rivalry –
Part 1 and Part 2

Review and feedback from last week

- The difference between self esteem and self confidence
- The importance of self confidence
- Parenting attitudes that kill self confidence in children (What NOT to do)
- Parenting attitudes that help develop self confidence in children (What TO DO)
- Questions and comments

Agenda for next two weeks

- What is sibling rivalry
- Sibling rivalry in toddlers:
 - Preparing the toddler for the new baby
- Why do older children fight
- What can parents do when children fight
- How to minimize sibling rivalry
- Recognizing when to get help

Points to ponder

- How did you get along with your siblings?
- Is there anything that you resented or felt unequal in treatment when you were growing up?
- How did your parents deal with sibling fights?
- How do you deal with it when your children fight?

What is sibling rivalry?

- Sibling rivalry is a type of competition or animosity among brothers and sisters, blood-related or not.
- Siblings generally spend more time together during childhood than they do with parents. The sibling bond is often complicated and is influenced by factors such as parental treatment, birth order, personality, and people and experiences outside the family.
- Sibling rivalry may be particularly intense when children are very close in age and of the same gender, or where one child is intellectually gifted or has special needs.
- Most children do get along better as they grow older
- Parents can influence, to a certain extent, how well children get along

Sibling rivalry in toddlers

- a. Reactions to a new baby
- b. Preparing for the new baby
- c. What to do after the baby comes



Possible reactions to the new baby

A toddler who feels jealous of a new baby will often...

- Try to get attention
- Want to be held and carried
- Get into trouble on purpose
- Not do what she is asked to do
- Act like a baby: he may suck his thumb, wet his pants, want to wear diapers or want to drink from a bottle.
- Try to hit the baby
- Become quiet
- Not want to have anything to do with the baby – demand that the baby ‘be sent back’
- Become upset and afraid

What to do before the baby comes

- Talk to your child about families with brothers and sisters so your child learns that many families have more than one child
- Tell your two-year-old, directly and truthfully, about the coming birth
- Explain what's going to happen at home once the baby arrives
- Tell your toddler stories about what they were like when they were babies
- Let your toddler get involved in the preparation for the baby
- Explain what will happen once you go into labour

What to do before the baby comes (contd.)

- Make changes to your child's routine at least three months before the baby arrives. Move your child to her new room or bed (if this is needed). Do not say these changes are because of the baby.
- Make major changes, such as toilet training or giving up a pacifier or bottle, at least a few months before you expect to give birth, and expect backsliding once the baby comes

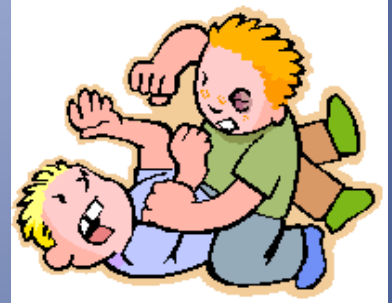
What to do before the baby comes (contd.)

- Depending on the age of your toddler, expect questions about how and when the baby got there
- Some books to consider:
 - **On the Day You Were Born by Debra Frasier**
 - **How You Were Born by Joanna Cole**
 - **You Were Born on Your Very First Birthday by Linda Girard**
 - **Being Born by Sheila Kitzinger**
 - **The Day I was Born by Marjorie Sharmat**
 - **A Baby is Born by Milton Levine**

What to do once your baby comes home

- Involve your toddler in looking after the baby. Let the child help you care for the baby. She can get diapers, clothes and toys. Do not force your child to help. Praise your child when she does help
- Ask your toddler for advice and help
- Let the child look at and touch the baby when he is ready. Don't force the baby on your older child
- Provide plenty of toddler time
- Maintain your child's routine as much as possible when the baby arrives

What to do once your baby comes home (contd.)



- Be prepared for aggression
- Resist the temptation to compare your children
- Acknowledge their negative feelings towards the baby
- Be consistent with your approach to discipline. Use the same rules you used before the baby was born

Why do kids fight?

- Evolving needs
- Individual temperaments
- Special needs/sick kids
- Role models
- “the root of sibling jealousy is each child’s deep desire for the exclusive love of his parents”

Strategies for dealing with sibling quarrels



1. Acknowledge their negative feelings

- Distinguish between negative feelings and hurtful actions

- **When you acknowledge negative feelings, it GREATLY increases the chances of them getting along**
- **You can do it with**
 - **Words**
 - **Wishes**
 - **Creative or symbolic activity**

- **However, hurtful actions, violence or bad language need not be tolerated**
- **Children need to have their hurtful actions stopped AND**
- **Shown how to discharge their angry feeling acceptably**

- 2. Do NOT compare your children either favourably or unfavourably

- **RESIST THE URGE TO COMPARE**
- Instead of comparing one child unfavourably to another, (*“Why can’t you hang up your clothes like your brother?”*) *speak to the child only* about the behaviour that displeases you.
 - ✓ **Describe what you see**
“I see a brand new jacket on the floor.”
 - OR
 - ✓ **Describe what you feel**
“That bothers me.”
 - OR
 - ✓ **Describe what needs to be done**
“This jacket belongs in the closet.”

Avoid favourable comparisons as well

- Instead of comparing one child favourably to another, (*“You’re so much neater than your brother”*) *speaking only about the behaviour that pleases you.*

✓ **Describe what you see**

“I see you hung up your jacket.”

OR

✓ **Describe what you feel**

“I appreciate that. I like seeing our hallway looking neat.”

- 3. Give up trying for equality between the children

Equal is not fair

- Children do not need to be treated equally
- They DO need to be treated uniquely and be appreciated and acknowledged for who they are

Avoiding the equal is fair trap

✓ **Instead of giving equal amounts** (*“Here, now you have just as many grapes as your sister.”*) . . . **give according to individual need.** (*“Do you want a few grapes, or a big bunch?”*)

✓ **Instead of showing equal love** (*“I love you the same as your sister.”*) . . . **show the child he or she is loved uniquely.** (*“You are the only ‘you’ in the whole wide world. No one could ever take your place.”*)

✓ **Instead of giving equal time** (*“After I’ve spent ten minutes with your sister, I’ll spend ten minutes with you.”*) . . . **Give time according to need.** (*“I know I’m spending a lot of time going over your sister’s composition. It’s important to her. As soon as I’m finished, I want to hear what’s important to you.”*)

- 4. Do not box your children into roles

Siblings in Roles

- Let no one lock a child into a role
- ✓ Not his parents

Instead of: *Salim, did you hide your brother's ball? Why are you always so mean?*

Parent: *Your brother wants his ball back.*

Siblings in Roles

✓ Not the child himself

Salim: *I know I'm mean.*

Parent: *You're also capable of being kind.*

✓ Not his brothers or sisters

Sister: *Salim, you're mean! Daddy, he won't lend me his Scotch tape.*

Parent: *Try asking him differently. You may be surprised at how generous he can be.*

✓ If Salim attacks his brother, attend to the brother without attacking Salim

Parent: *That must hurt. Let me rub it. Salim needs to learn how to express his feelings with words, not fists!*

- 5. Deal with 'problem children' and 'special children' effectively

- **Children with problems do not need to be viewed as problem children**

Children with problems

They do need:

✓ **Acceptance of their frustration**

“This isn’t easy. It can be frustrating.”

✓ **Appreciation for what they have accomplished, however imperfect**

“You got a lot closer that time.”

✓ **Help in focusing on solutions**

“This is tough. What do you do in a case like this?”

- 6. Learn when and how to intervene effectively when children fight



When the Kids Fight

- What do you do when kids fight?

Your response depends upon the situation

- ***Level I: Normal bickering***
 1. Ignore it. Think about your next vacation.
 2. Tell yourself the children are having an important experience in conflict resolution.

Your response depends upon the situation

- *Level II: Situation heating up. Here, adult intervention might be helpful.*

1. Acknowledge their anger

"You two sound mad at each other!"

2. Reflect each child's point of view

"So Sara, you want to keep on holding the kitten, because he's just settled down in your arms. And you Bilal, feel you're entitled to a turn too."

3. Describe the problem with respect

"That's a tough one: Two children and only one kitten."

4. Express confidence in the children's ability to find their own solution

"I have confidence that you two can work out a solution that's fair to each of you . . . and fair to the kitten."

5. Leave the room

Your response depends upon the situation

Level III: Situation possibly dangerous

1. Inquire:

“Is this a play fight or a real fight?” (Play fights are permitted. Real fights are not.)

2. Let the children know:

“Play fighting by mutual consent only.” (If it’s not fun for both, it’s got to stop.)

3. Respect your feelings:

“You may be playing, but it’s too rough for me. You need to find another activity.”

Your response depends upon the situation

Level IV: Situation definitely dangerous! Adult intervention necessary.

1. Describe what you see.

“I see two very angry children who are about to hurt each other.”

2. Separate the children.

“It’s not safe to be together. We must have a cooling-off period. Quick, you to your room, and you to yours!”

- 7. Help children resolve conflicts by using family meetings effectively

Helping children resolve a difficult situation

- **1. Call a meeting of the concerned parties and explain the purpose of the meeting.**
“There’s a situation in this family that’s causing unhappiness. We need to see what can be worked out to help everyone feel better.”
- **2. Explain the ground rules to everyone.**
“We’re calling this meeting because something is bothering Sakina. First we’ll be hearing from Sakina —with no interruptions. When she’s finished, we want to hear how you see things Amir, and no one will interrupt you.”
- **3. Write down each child’s feelings and concerns. Read them aloud to both children to be sure you’ve understood them correctly.**
“It scares Sakina when we go out. She says Amir is mean to her. Last time he turned off the TV and yanked her off the couch and hurt her arm.”

Helping children resolve a difficult situation

- 4. Allow each child time for rebuttal.

Sakina: I have a black and blue mark to prove you hurt me. And my program had only five minutes to go!

Amir: That's an old black and blue mark. And the program was just beginning.

- 5. Invite everyone to suggest as many solutions as possible. Write down all ideas without evaluating. Let the kids go first.
- 6. Decide upon solutions you can all live with.
- 7. Follow-up.
- *"We'll meet again next Sunday to see if we're satisfied with the way things are going."*

- 8. Minimize sibling conflict by creating a cooperative family culture

Minimizing sibling rivalry

- ✓ *Make sure that each child gets some time alone with you several times a week.*
- ✓ *When spending time with one child, don't talk about the other.*
- ✓ *Don't lock the children into the position in the family constellation (oldest, youngest, middle). Allow each child the opportunity to experience some of the privileges and responsibilities of the other.*

Minimizing sibling rivalry

- ✓ *Let each child know what it is about him that his siblings like or admire.*
- ✓ *Schedule family meetings to set ground rules for handling conflict and discuss ongoing issues.*

- 9. Make peace with your siblings!!!

- 10. Know when to get professional help

Getting professional help

- Seek additional help if:
- Conflict is so severe that it is affecting marital relationship
- Creates a real danger of physical danger for a family member
- Is damaging self esteem or psychological health of another sibling
- May be related to another significant concern such as depression or being bullied

Questions and comments?