



BIG FEELINGS AND SIBLING RIVALRY: FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE

Parenting is filled with many personal decisions. Each family has its own unique culture and values. There's no such thing as perfect parenting and there are no right answers! But because it's such a complex and meaningful role, there's much we can learn from one another if we share our ideas and strategies with an open mind and open heart. Sharing our failures and successes can provide invaluable support and help us feel like we are in this together!

DISCUSS GROUND RULES

- Set an intention to create a safe space together for sharing.
- Open your mind and heart to learn from others.
- Listen with empathy for thoughts and feelings.
- Look for common ground and learn from diverse opinions.
- Suspend the voice of judgement.
- Do not fix other problems or problem-solve for another.
- Pause and offer quiet before responding.
- Use mirroring—Reflect what you hear with feelings, images, metaphors and gestures.

BEFORE WE BEGIN, HERE ARE SOME FACTS

Sibling rivalry can involve...

- Competing and comparing one to the other.
- Jealousy or contending for caregivers' time or attention.
- Arguing, teasing, name-calling or getting into physical fights.

What Sibling Rivalry Is Not

- Your child grappling with how to share their belongings
- Your child voicing feelings about being treated unequally
- Your child grappling with respecting personal boundaries and space

SCENARIO

Your oldest child plays basketball and has outgrown their shoes from last year. You surprise them when you come home with a new pair. Their younger sibling sulks and complains, "Hey! What about me?!" You explain that they do not play basketball but when they need a costume for the musical they are in, they'll get it. The younger child begins to lash out verbally at their sibling about always getting everything and stomps upstairs. The older sibling mocks the younger one as they exit the kitchen. The two begin to tease each other with name-calling such as "stupid" and "spoiled." After a few minutes you find the two siblings are upstairs shouting and arguing with one another.

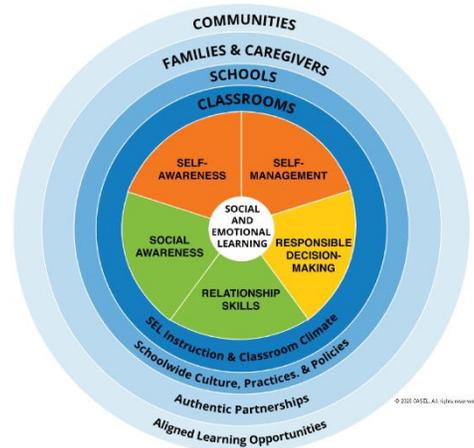
First, YOU are not alone if some similar version of this story has happened to you! There's NO one way to respond!



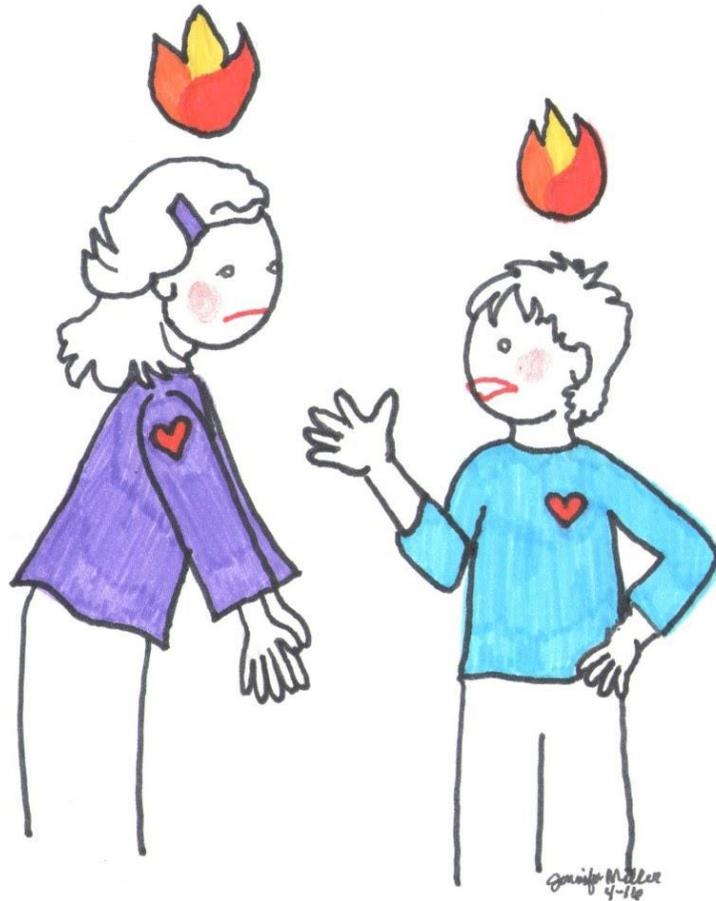
TALK ABOUT IT!

Build your parenting social and emotional intelligence collaboratively by sharing thoughts and ideas. Before sharing how you might respond in this situation, discuss your thoughts on the following questions:

- How would you feel in this situation? How do you believe each of your children are feeling?
- What social and emotional skill(s) do you have that you can promote in your child #1? What about in child #2?
- What social and emotional skill(s) do you have that you can promote in yourself?
- How might you respond to your feelings if you acted on impulse or quickly reacted?
- Using social and emotional skills to think about your responses, in what ways might you react to this situation that models and builds skills?



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DID YOU KNOW?

When you or your child are incredibly upset, your brain capacity is limited! You can only think about fight, flight or freeze. But none of those options are healthy and reasonable in many parenting situations. And for a child, they cannot learn the lesson we are hoping to teach when they are emotionally hijacked. That is why including time and space to calm down in your strategy is key! When you and your child deeply breathe in and out, your brain opens up and your ability to think creatively and problem-solve increases.

Does this information change how you might respond?

NEXT STEPS...

Want to take the learning home to your family? Every family fights. It's normal! But HOW we fight matters. In fact, there are ways that we can argue that deepen our trust and strengthen our intimacy. And there are ways that we can argue that destroy trust and whittle away at our close relationships. Use the following [Fighting Fairly Family Pledge](#) which offers five ways we can agree to argue that offer opportunities for growth and six ways to argue that are destructive and we won't use. There's a place for each family member to sign the agreement. Post in a visible location and reflect after arguments to see how well you did in sticking to your agreements.

