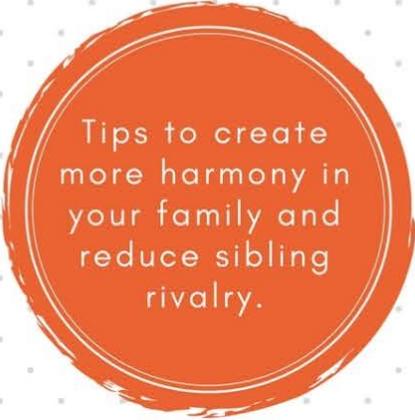

Getting Along as a Family

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Tips to create
more harmony in
your family and
reduce sibling
rivalry.

Introduction

Living from day to day as busy family can be stressful for all members of the family. This often leads to friction, arguments and sibling rivalry. This collection of articles provides some tips that can help all members of the family to improve their ability to empathize with others, to communicate clearly, handle conflicts and how to improve connectedness.

For most parents, the desire to love and provide for their child is as natural as breathing. But the truth is in this day and age where people are inundated with text messages, social media, nontraditional work schedules, hundreds of channels on television and increased financial demands – more parents than ever are struggling to feel truly connected to their child. It is normal to become slightly removed in your involvement as your child becomes more independent, but children still need to know they have someone to turn to whenever life becomes challenging.

We hope this will help your family can become a more peaceful environment where each member of the family feels supported and that they can have the space they need to do their own thing while also encouraging more fun times with each other.

Ways to Connect with Your Children

At one point or another all parents fear that they aren't connecting with their children as well as they want to. You might start to worry that you don't know them as well as you should, or that they may be doing things that you would not recommend. The fear can be almost paralyzing. The good news is that this problem can be solved, and it isn't even difficult. By even wanting to connect with the children in your life, you are already making great strides toward your goal. It is important to care about them and what goes on around them. Take time to realize that you're doing a good thing, and that should help boost your confidence on the matter.

Talk (and Listen) to Them

The most basic way to connect with your children is to talk to them. Tell them about your day and ask about theirs. Try to remember everything they tell you. Children have a memory that just won't quit sometimes, and they expect you to have the same. Ask them questions. It's important for people to feel like the person they are talking to cares about what they have to say. Asking questions about what they told you it proves you were listening and want to know more. Don't expect your kids to tell you everything about themselves in one sitting. It takes time to build the kind of connection you are looking for, especially with teens and older children who are still feeling rebellious.

Take an Interest in their Interests

Sometimes just talking doesn't work for all kids. They may have built their guard up too high to realize that you just want to help them. In this case it may be a good idea to consider doing something else together. If your child likes to play video games, ask for the second controller and play too. Maybe help them with an art project they're working on. You can try to get involved in anything they like to do. They may still try to shut you out sometimes, but eventually you will find something to do together.

Just try not to seem judgmental about their hobbies. If they aren't hurting anyone, then you shouldn't be concerned. If they start to feel that you don't appreciate what they love, they will start to push you further away.

Invite Them into Your World

If you can't find common ground in the things they like to do, maybe you should look for some in the things you enjoy. It's not uncommon for children to forget that parents or guardians are people too. If you're willing to show them who you are, then perhaps they will open up and do the same. You can invite them to one of your favorite shows or sporting events. Let them meet some of your coworkers. If your children are old enough, then you can take them with you to the gym or your yoga class. Anything can work as long as you can get them interested.

Find a New Hobby

You may find that you simply have no current interests in common with your child. That's OK. In this case, you can talk to them about finding something new for the two of you to do together. Try to find something that neither of you have done and you both find at least mildly interesting, and start together. Neither of you will be the leader in this activity because no one has more experience. Even if you find out that you both hated the activity, you at least have a mutual experience to work with.

You can also make this a family activity. Whether it is building model airplanes or learning to golf as a family, shared life experiences create greater feelings of connectedness in families. Make sure the skill or pastime you decide to pursue is something each member of your family is happy to learn or try. If you are having a hard time coming up with ideas on your own, invite your children to make suggestions until you each agree on your new hobby.

There's a Time for Friendship and a Time for Parenting

It's great to be your child's friend. The feeling is unmatched. But it can be easy to take it too far. You should never forget that you are a guardian first. You are there primarily to see to it that the child in your care is safe and grows up well. A balance must be found between parenting and friendship. You need your child to trust you enough to tell you about the things going on around you but also to feel safe enough to seek true guidance from you.

Don't Get Discouraged

Kids can be difficult. It may seem that no matter what you try, you're still feeling just as distant from them as when you started. Don't give up. They know what you're trying to do, and on some level, they appreciate it, even if they don't make it obvious right now. If nothing else, they will at least think of you when they face any struggles and remember that at least one person cares for them. Sometimes that's enough.

Implement a screen-free dinner

More families than ever spend their dinner time sitting around a television set or playing with their cell phones. One way to become a more connected parent is by implementing a strict, no-screen policy for one hour during dinnertime. It may feel strange at first, but as you begin to make this policy a part of your regular routine, you and your family will naturally begin to open up more and experience a more connected environment.

Spend one-on-one time with each child

Connecting as a family can be relatively easy for some parents and children, however, more introverted individuals may need some additional time to truly connect. Having one-on-one time with each child in your family will allow you each to connect on a deeper and more meaningful way. Make sure whatever activity you choose to do together includes fun and also time for private conversation.

Make family night a weekly occurrence

It is not uncommon for adults and children to occasionally feel mentally depleted. An easy way to respect everyone's need to unwind and relax without the pressure of conversation and cooking is by doing a weekly family night, where you rent a movie, order take-out food and just relax together as a family.

Take an interest in your child's passions

Being interested in the things your child enjoys may seem intimidating at first, but it can be one of the most rewarding ways you ever connect with them. If your child is musical it may be a good idea to sign them up for lessons, if they like to build things a robotics club could help them fine tune their skills. When you take notice in the things that are important to your child and give them opportunities to polish their skills, they will feel more connected than ever because your involvement teaches them that their contribution to your family matters.

If you are struggling to slow down and connect with your children there are countless little habits you can shift each day to show your child how valued they are. Of course, one of the best things you could do to foster a more connected relationship is to speak with your child and ask them how they would enjoy spending their time with you!

Why Family Meetings Are a Great Way to Stay Connected

Communication is the key to living together in harmony. It doesn't matter if your family is small (two partners) or large (partners and various children) – family meetings are a great way for a family to stay connected. Read through this article and see if you can find some ideas which will help you reconnect and communicate better with your own family.

Relationships can be tough. You may be going along fine when all of a sudden something is said and misunderstood. Before you know it there's a rift in your relationship and someone's feelings are hurt. Whether you're a parent or a child, you'll want to repair your relationship as quickly as possible.

Family meetings can be used by parents to establish ground rules for the children to follow. They can teach children or teens how to solve problems with parents role playing with them. They can also be the perfect time for allowing family members to discuss things which are important to the family as a whole. Ultimately, they help you stay connected as a family which will keep the family strong.

Establishing regular family meetings will give everyone in your family a chance to work toward a central goal. Everyone gets to voice their opinions and help make decisions in a family meeting. Your child who hasn't been very good at expressing themselves in the past may finally find their voice and be willing to make their feelings known.

You decide who to include in your family meeting. It could include your immediate family but if there's something that affects your extended family who lives nearby you may want to include them as well. It is possible you may even want to include people who are renting from you if what you discuss pertains to them. You make the rules, so you decide who to include.

Try to have an agenda for your family meeting even if it's just a loose one. Set some ground rules as far as behavior is concerned. You want everyone to feel safe during the meeting and not like they're being attacked. Decide ahead of time to try to keep the meeting short and to the point. Your goal is to address topics which matter the whole family as well as give everyone a chance to express their feelings on the topic at hand.

Rather than discussing only problems or behavioral issues, try to use your family meeting as a time to congratulate your children for doing well in school, for an adult getting a raise or something else that's positive. If all you talk about at family meetings are the bad things going on, no one will want to be at the meeting and they may blow them off. Having positive things to talk about will help keep people's attention.

Take a little bit of time during each family meeting to do something or plan something fun. Keep the family calendar handy so you can see what dates are available for a trip to the zoo, a

movie or dinner out. Give your family something to look forward to, particularly if everyone has been trying to do better about working together.

Family meetings can be a great way for a family to stay connected. It also provides a time for problems to be discussed and congratulations to be made. More importantly, having family meetings can help keep your family together – which may be the best benefit of having them.

Ways to Improve Family Communication

Healthy communication skills amongst family members can be some of the most difficult and trying to develop and maintain. They may be directly related to you and have seen you in every possible situation, but that doesn't mean finding ways to communicate comes easily. Family members sometimes tend to be tougher on each other and more open about any and all feelings they may be having.

While this can sometimes be favorable, it can also lead to conflict, strained relationships, and undue tension. But since there are no more important ties than the ones you have with your family members, it is important to work on improving the lines of communication amongst each other. Below are five ways to improve family communication.

Start with a clean slate – In order to start improving communication, it is important to start with a clean slate and clear minds. This may take a bit of work up front, starting with some tough conversations. Starting the process by having some open, raw conversations and getting everything on the table can be a therapeutic way to start repairing relationships.

Set goals – Goals help keep you focused on the task at hand and can be used as a benchmark to work towards. The goals can be as simple as having a text conversation with every family member once a week or as in-depth as setting family retreats once a month – it is completely up to the family as to what they're looking to accomplish.

Participate in team building exercises – When you feel in sync with your family members, you're more likely to be open with them about your thoughts and feelings. Team building exercises can be a great way to build up the trust and confidence in each other that may have been lost over the years and start working towards a better place. These exercises don't have to be put on by some formal establishment or third party; even simple tasks such as doing trust falls amongst each other can be a great starting point.

Have each member pick a group activity – Even though you're related, your family members may be drastically different from you, especially in terms of hobbies and personal taste. By having everyone pick a group activity to do, you're not only acknowledging your differences but celebrating them. Participating in these activities may even bring about some similarities or common interests that were previously unknown!

Familial relationships are some of, if not THE, most important relationships of ones life. Even though they are built on unconditional love, they can still become tarnished and worn

throughout the years. By making it a priority to improve communication amongst family members, you will soon see results and be well on your way to overall improved relationships.

Empathy: Teaching Kids to Value Others

Empathy is one of those strange qualities – something almost everyone wants, but few know how to truly give or receive it. In a world where self-gratification is emphasized, it is in short supply but high demand. This is all the more reason to teach the next generation what it means to have empathy for those around them.

What Is Empathy?

Many people confuse sympathy and empathy, but they are two distinct values. Empathy is not just the ability to understand someone's feelings; criminals often take advantage of people by appearing to understand their feelings and subsequently gaining their trust. Empathy is more than that. Not only is it the ability to recognize how someone feels, but it also values and respects the feelings of another person. It means treating others with kindness, dignity, and understanding.

Kids Need to See Adults Show Empathy

While some children are gifted with naturally kind hearts, in most cases kids need to see empathy modeled by the adults around them. It begins with the way parents relate to their children. Parents who show an interest in the things that matter to their kids and respond to emotions in a positive and caring way are teaching the skill of empathy.

Meet Emotional Needs

When children have their emotional needs met, two things happen. They learn how to meet the emotional needs of others and they are anchored in what they are receiving, meaning that they are secure enough to give to others when the need arises but first they need to receive. An empty jug cannot fill a cup.

Talk To Kids About Emotional Needs

Many adults find it hard to talk about emotional needs or anything related to emotions. Consequently, they spend their lives tiptoeing around the subject of emotions. These are people who don't know how to handle the emotions of others and are uncomfortable with any situation that calls for an emotional response. Sometimes they are afraid of their own emotions because they have never learned how to deal with emotional needs.

It's a good idea to talk to kids about emotions and how other people experience them. Give their emotions names (for example, jealousy, anger, and love) and teach them that these are normal. Talk to them about how to handle emotions in a positive way and point out situations where other people are experiencing emotions. Teach them about respecting the emotions of others and show them how to act in a situation where a response is required.

Look for Real Life Situations to Practice Empathy

There is nothing like a real life example to model what you are teaching. Look for situations that affect another person and talk to your kids about what it means to the people involved and how they might feel. For example, if you see an ambulance speed past, talk about how the family members of the sick person might be feeling.

Play Games

Younger kids in particular love to pretend that they are someone or something else. You can use these fun times for teaching empathy. Get your kids playing the role of another person. This might be a character in a book or on TV, or even someone you know who has been through a significant experience lately. You can act out the story together and ask your kids to stop and imagine how their character might have been feeling at any given moment. This will focus their attention on the emotions that another person might experience when in that situation. You can ask them to make faces that reflect the feelings of their character.

Develop Their Inner Moral Compass

Teaching your kids the difference between right and wrong from a young age gives them a strong internal moral compass that will direct them to make good choices. In situations that require a decision, help them to see how our choices and behavior affect others. Talk to them about how wrongdoing harms others and help them to see the hurt and damage that it causes. It's a good idea to talk to them about the little things such as calling a sibling an unkind name that hurts her feelings or refusing to play with their brother when friends visit. When building a strong moral foundation, start small and begin with the basics.

Empathetic Kids: Givers Not Takers

By raising your kids to understand and practice empathy, you're giving them the gift of giving. In a world where great emphasis is placed on looking out for your own interests, people who are givers are all too rare. But they are the ones who enjoy the greatest satisfaction from life, live the most meaningful lives, and enjoy more rewarding relationships. Teaching your kids empathy is a worthwhile investment for their own futures and for the world they will inhabit.

Some Steps for Resolving Conflict

Relationships are made up of two individuals with different temperaments and personalities. As a result, disagreements are going to occur. It's not a matter of if a problem will arise but how to solve it together.

Take a Break

There is great wisdom in the stop and "count to 10" advice. This time allows for a time to avoid reaction that can inflame the situation. Taking a break can be, I think I need to take a walk to settle down or let me just have some time to myself and let's come back and work on this. This does NOT mean storming out or avoiding the problem all together. It's a cooling down period to hopefully usher in reason and logic as opposed to reaction and anger.

See the Other Side

Once the strong feelings have settled then take a moment ,if you need to, in order to stop and look at the situation through the eyes and heart of the person you are arguing with. If you do this consistently, in time you will grow to understand the person instead of being inclined to attack them. This takes practice which requires a decision, a choice and eventually is will become a positive habit.

Find Common Ground

Think about the things you agree on and can find commonality in. If you can outweigh the negative thoughts with positive ones, you will find it much easier to resolve your conflict. You can start to remind each other that you are partners rather than enemies.

Really Listen

It's natural to want to explain your side, be defensive and shut off listening to your partner. This only alienates and causes hard feelings. Sit and absorb what the other person is saying. Ask questions about their point of view. Repeat back to them what they are saying in order to clarify if you are understanding them correctly. This will take the conflict from hostile back to a place where you actually care what the other person is thinking and feeling. This goes both ways.

Compromise When Possible

If at all possible, compromise and negotiate. There are times when too much is at stake to give up your position and find middle ground, but most of the time it is quite manageable to find a solution that can eventually work for everyone. Work together to find a way for everyone to feel that the outcome is reasonable.

Let It Go

If you have gotten caught up in a mess that seems impossible to resolve, decide to end it immediately. If you are in a conflict with someone who is important to you, remind yourself that the relationship is worth more than being right. Forgive each other and move on. It is rarely worth winning an argument if you lose an important relationship in the process. It is important to understand that not all couple's issues can be resolved easily. A qualified counselor can help to provide tools and strategies that bring you both back onto safe and common ground. You are a work in progress and the time spent on nurturing your healthy relationships will be worth it in the end.

Teaching Conflict Resolution to Your Children

Children will be children. And if you have more than one in a room, there's a good bet there will be an argument or conflict at some point. Teaching conflict resolution to your children will reduce your frustrations and help bring peace to your home.

One way to address conflict resolution is by using books. Authors of children's books are able to write to a child's level of understanding. They create characters that children can identify with. The story can be used to describe a conflict between characters as well as demonstrate to children the best way to resolve that conflict. Once they see a different way to resolve problems, they'll be more likely to use those skills the next time they have a conflict.

While you're reading the story to your children, stop occasionally to discuss what's going on. Ask them questions like:

- Have you ever felt that way?
- What have you done in a similar situation in the past?
- How do you think _____ feels about what happened to them?
- What do you think _____ is going to do?
- What would you do?

Continue reading the story and talking about what's going on in it. Help them understand there are two sides to every argument or conflict. Ask them about their feelings and how their feelings might affect what they say or do. You could also ask them how they might resolve what's going on in the story before you read that part. Finally, ask them what the character learned from the situation in the book and how that knowledge could help them solve their own conflicts.

Talk about appropriate ways to handle conflicts. Remind them to never use violence because violence never solves a problem; it only creates others. Help them see that talking about a problem and working toward a resolution together is the best way to resolve a conflict.

Do your best to be a good role model for your children. If you live with other people, you're going to have a conflict sooner or later. Remember that your children are watching you. They want to see how you handle conflicts, even with them – especially once you start teaching them about it. If you get angry, yell and shout, they are less likely to believe that's not the right

way to resolve conflict. Try to remain calm and talk about things rather than letting your emotions get the best of you.

Here are some steps you may want to model for them:

- When you begin feeling angry or frustrated, stop before you say something you'll regret.
- Take a deep breath and count to ten.
- Calmly explain how you feel about what happened or was said.
- Listen to what the other person has to say about the subject.
- Think about different solutions to the problem.
- If you can't reach an agreement which both of you can accept, ask someone not involved to help you resolve the conflict. Agree to abide by what the third party suggests.

Once you begin teaching conflict resolution to your children, you may notice less stress and fussing in your home. Continue to work with them when they have disagreements, model conflict resolution before them, and your children will be better equipped to handle any conflicts they have in the future. And isn't that what parenting is all about – equipping our children for life outside of your home?

9 Ways to Deal with Sibling Rivalry

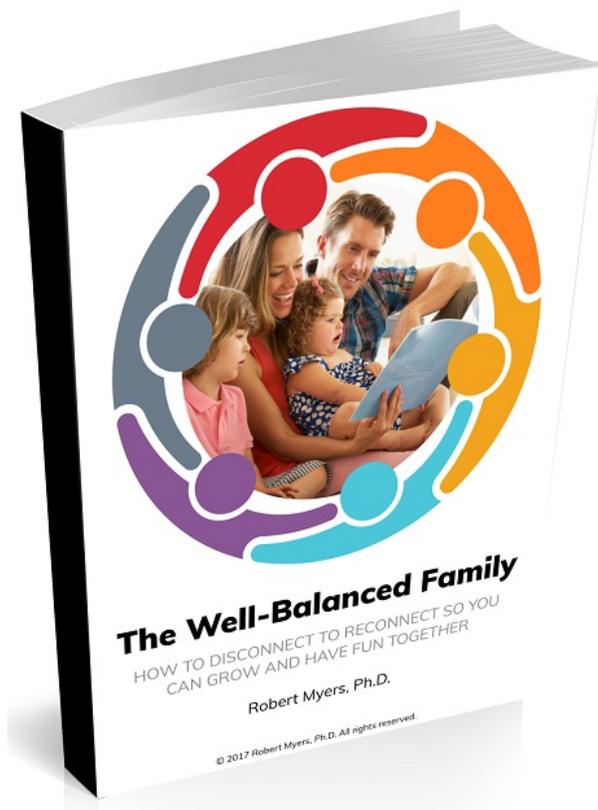
All relationships have moments of tension, disagreement, and problem solving. The family unit is the first place where a child can learn conflict resolution especially related to sibling rivalry. One or more of the following tactics can help to bring peace to your home.

1. Older children can participate in caring for a younger sibling. This will encourage your children to feel involved and contribute to the family. However, it's important not to "overuse" your older child by giving him responsibilities that should be left to parents. This can cause resentment instead of building a bond.
2. Comparing your children should be avoided. Every individual has his strengths and talents which should be encouraged. This teaches acceptance of and appreciation for being a unique individual.
3. Encourage conflict resolution without interference. It may be necessary to help set the tone and create boundaries, but allow siblings to talk things through without you refereeing as much as possible.
4. Anger needs to be dealt with before a satisfactory resolution can be reached. Set limits as far as what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Hitting, name-calling, and putting one another down are not acceptable and you'll want to step in if your children begin using any of those tactics. You may not want to act like the police, but it may be necessary at times.
5. Discipline should be done in private and never in front of the other sibling. This avoids one upmanship-like behavior, which just escalates negativity.
6. It's important for each sibling to have their own space. If it's not possible to have separate rooms, organize the room in such a way that each has ownership of their belongings. Rules that teach respect for each others' possessions and space such as "ask-don't-take" and "clean up after ourselves" should be established.
7. Spending individual time with each child doing things they enjoy will let them know how special they are to you. It will also allow your children to have your undivided attention, if only for a little while.
8. Family meetings can be helpful for letting children voice differences or complaints. They're also an opportunity for parents to restate family rules about how to treat one another or add new rules.

9. Choose your battles wisely. You know your children are not always going to agree, so you might spend all of your time coming between them if you don't let them handle things on their own. Squabbling about who had a toy first is not that important, but pestering each other until they feel they have no recourse other than to torture each other definitely needs your attention.

The Well-Balanced Family:

How to Disconnect to Reconnect So You Can Grow and Have Fun Together



In a time where everyone from your spouse to your tween seems glued to their electronic device 24 / 7, it can be tough to spend quality time together.

Learn how you can reconnect as a family by planning fun and healthy activities, establishing regular routines and good habits – and ditching the electronics.

In this eBook by Robert Myers, Ph.D., a licensed clinical child and adolescent psychologist, you'll learn:

The Value of Play: Learn what free play is, and how it can help encourage your child use their imagination and become more independent.

How to Be a Fit Family: You'll find plenty of tips on ways your family can stay active together, with suggestions for kids of all ages, from toddlers to teens.

The Importance of Family Meetings: Learn how to schedule regular check-ins with your family to make sure everyone's opinions are being heard, and every family member feels valued.

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