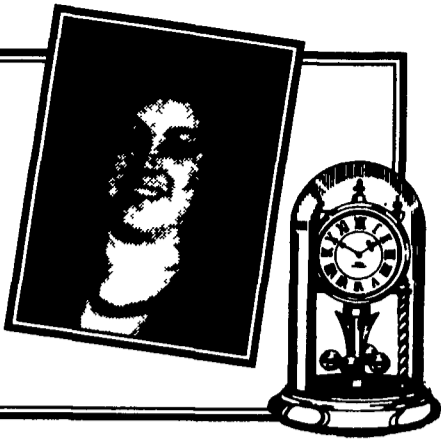


Taking Time
by
Rebecca Escott



He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not

To some "he loves me, he loves me not" may be the musings of a teenage girl about her beau, but to many children it's a painful questions that they ask about their parents or their brothers and sisters. When "baby makes three (or four)," the family suddenly has all the makings for war under one roof.

Sibling rivalry has existed since the beginning of time and the experts don't even suggest that we try to end it. Rather, they encourage parents to understand it and to take positive steps to manage all the rollercoaster feelings that they and their children feel when energy and attention must be shared.

Sounds easy, but it isn't. I

think if you ask parents, the gut reaction is to forbid fighting when their kids start bickering about who called the front seat first. Adults tend to force apologies and demand sharing when arguments over the computer or a toy erupt. And the results aren't satisfactory. Parents are hungry for the magical medicine that will calm the sea of pushing, tattletaling, fury-causing "looks," and unspoken competition.

Into that sea, come Adele Faber and Elain Mazlish, authors of *Siblings without Rivalry*, with some insight and encouragement.

Interestingly, these authors have found that when sibling fighting is entirely forbidden, the children grow up also not having a relationship with one another. Somehow in bickering, children are also bonding and learning social negotiation skills. That's why experts advise parents not to have the unreasonable goal of eliminating rivalry but rather of managing it (or helping sons and daughters manage it) better.

Faber advises, with low level bickering, to simply let it run its course. When the argument escalates, however, adults should intervene.

First, speak directly to the children's feelings, "Boy, you two are furious with each other!"

Noticing their feelings actually reduces the intensity of the anger. Finally someone is noticing their pain.

Second, listen to each person's position on the problem. "One at a time..." "Oh, you wanted to use the computer because your promised to send your friend a note as soon as you got home." "Oh, you wanted to use the computer to finish your homework and you can't wait because your favorite TV show is

coming on TV and you have to have your homework done before you watch TV."

Third, acknowledge the complexity of the problem. Say to them, "Wow, this is a very difficult situation. Both of you want to use the computer right now for different things."

Fourth, give them permission to think up a solution. "I have confidence that you can come up with a solution to the problem that is fair to you, [child's name] and also fair to you, [sibling's name]."

According to Faber, it's important to stress that the solution must be fair to both. Otherwise, the older, stronger, savvier child comes up with the solution, and it really doesn't feel fair to both.

Finally, leave the room with a short comment. "If you want to you can tell me what you come up with." Try to not let them follow you and draw you back into the problem. Expect silence. After some awkward moments, the children will usually timidly venture into solving the problem.

Brothers and sisters truly do have the capacity to solve problems, but parents need to set the tone and give messages about how they believe in the kids and value their combined skills.

"Stop it. What is there to fight about?" "Why can't you share, etc.?" "Now neither of you can..." "Give it to her, she's younger" "You're making me crazy. Wait until you have children of your own, you'll see." are all rather ineffective ways to respond. Faber also says, calling "Hey, you two, work it out!" from a neighboring room is also ineffective. An adult's physical presence, personal listening, and then clear directions gives children the structure they need to move ahead and work through an argument.

This is an important lesson. It tells a child that both avoiding the fight and screaming and bullying their way to victory are not good choices. Instead fair negotiation is the best way to handle differences. Wouldn't it be great if adults took the time to tackle grown-up problems in the same way?



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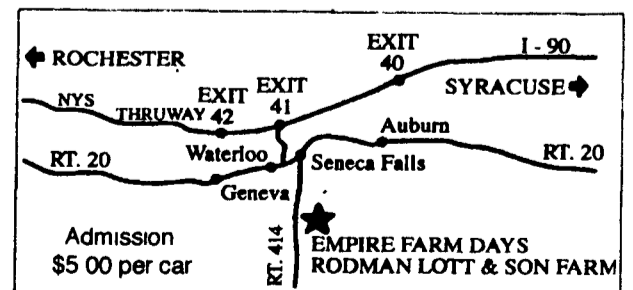
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