

# SIBLINGS

Care of Self | Care of Others | Care of Environment

## Care of Self

Older siblings can model brushing teeth, scrubbing toes, putting on lotion, taking medicine, brushing hair, laying quietly during nap or rest time, hand washing, taking deep breaths and doing yoga poses, and using the toilet. Ask older siblings to come in and "help" when you are doing these things for your younger child and slowly invite big sis or big bro to take over.

## Care of Others

Big brother or sister can help the younger sibling(s) with snack preparation and eating, clean up, choosing and then sitting on a pillow during a Zoom call, picking out the day's outfit, putting on socks and shoes, picking out a book before bed, being "tucked in", putting on a bandaid, and lifting heavy things.

## Care of Environment

The older child can model sweeping, polishing, wiping, pushing in chairs, returning books and toys to their place, folding a nap blanket, pairing socks, putting the cap on a marker, using a sponge to clean a small spill, organizing shoes in a closet, sitting and folding hands to wait patiently, petting the dog gently, and sorting beans or other small items.



According to research, having a sibling or siblings significantly alters how you grow up and who you become. And it's not simple.

Some studies suggest that having a healthy sibling relationship reinforces conflict resolution skills and adds to overall happiness and security in life while a toxic sibling relationship can negatively impact a person's psyche for the long haul. Sibling relationships matter.

In early childhood, the most we can do to guide and support siblings as they learn to love one another and live together is





**"Brothers and sisters are as close as hands and feet."— Vietnamese Proverb**

- Don't interrupt play and giggling by asking questions or showing approval, let siblings create a world with one another that is sacred and doesn't involve you.
- Try to avoid saying "your sister" or "your brother" when you can use the children's names. Let them decide when feeling like a sister or brother comes into play.
- Have a special day where one parent does something private and away from home with only one child at a time. Give it a name like "Dad and daughter day". But make sure there's also a "Dad and brother day".
- Say "I'm so glad I have two of you, my life is better with you both".

**"Siblings are the people we practice on, the people who teach us about fairness and cooperation and kindness and caring, quite often the hard way." — Pamela Dugdale**

define what is and what is not OK and enforce it peacefully and consistently. As parents we have to know what the rules are, model them, and assist as the children learn to be together under those "rules" or family cultural norms.

**Sibling Rivalry**

Younger children look up to older children and it is suggested that the relationship with the older child might be as significant to the younger sibling as, if not more so, than the relationship with parents. It's important that we encourage the older child to take responsibility for being a big brother or sister, but not to the point that the older child resents the younger child. Give space and time off for the older child, but consistently encourage taking responsibility for being one who can do things the little one can't.

There will be conflict. There will be jealousy. When we respond to conflict and jealousy as if it's unacceptable and wrong, we are missing golden parenting opportunities.

When conflict takes place, name what is and is not OK and offer verbal affirmations like, "*it's OK to be angry I understand that you are angry, but we will fix the problem without hitting*". Or, "*I see that it bothers you when Sally touches your things without asking, I think she's too young to understand how to ask so how about we put a few things here that you are OK with her taking, and the rest we will put on a higher shelf that she can't reach. Does that work for you? One day she'll be able to ask first but until then, we can solve this problem without yelling at her, I don't think that's working.*"

Showing equal amounts of love and attention, giving the children some activities that have to be done together but others that can be done separately (both are of value), understanding how sharing works and protecting the solitude of the sibling during concentration, modeling helpful phrases, and being patient during tears and outbursts might take longer than time-out or just separating them, but in the end, two siblings who learn to talk, take turns, care for one another, and enjoy independence and autonomy without shame will grow up to have an irreplaceable partner in life. Our job in the early years is to referee and monitor, but not control. And this job won't last forever.

**"Of All Things, Love Is The Most Potent" -Maria Montessori**