

Sibling Rivalry, Episode 54



Power of Moms
A Gathering Place for Deliberate Mothers

This episode we are going back into the Power of Moms archives to a valuable phone conversation Power of Moms co-founders April Perry and Saren Loosli had last fall.

If your children seem to be arguing all the time, you are not alone. Power of Moms is a gathering place for deliberate mothers; deliberate does not mean perfect. Deliberate means we are purposeful in trying to build great families and strengthening ourselves as women.

Sibling rivalry is a very real thing and something moms all need to deal with. Saren's parents refused to solve sibling rivalry themselves. They made them solve their problems with each other. Now, as adults, they are all great friends. They still have strong opinions and issues even as adults, but they are good about knowing how to solve agreements and emerge with friendship and love intact.

Life is full of issues with people. Saren tells her children they were born to be best friends and that it's great to be able to be in the same family with their best friends. Then she gives them tools to help them be their best friends. Some days it seems like they don't even remotely like each other; other days it's clear things are sinking in.

April said it's important for every mother to know that siblings fight. It's natural. They ask moms at retreats if anyone has children who fight and everyone raises their hands. It's normal. Any group of people who live in the same house sharing a lot of things are going to have conflicts. April is learning specific strategies that can be put in place to help moms who are struggling with their children engaging in sibling rivalry.

For kids who've developed a habit for creating conflict, sometimes helping them develop a personal strategy for solving it is the best. It typically needs to be pretty individualized.

- Wait until the moment has passed and then taken the opportunity to talk through the conflicts with the child. This works best with older children who can reason and think through their actions.
- Remind child who is causing problems that they are a nice person who knows how to treat others kindly.
- Acknowledge other siblings can be annoying sometimes. If child says something that is cutting or mean, give them a warning and ask them to fix the situation and apologize and have a pre-determined consequence or sign

Amy McCreedy has a wonderful positive parenting book. She goes into why children are fighting and squabbling with each other. Reasons go to competition and the desire to feel loved.

With younger children there are some preventative steps. Notice that they fight more when they're tired, they're hungry, and when they are with each other all the time. They need to have a space of their own where they can keep their own things.

April's family has rotations for things like where kids can sit in the car. They fight over where they want to sit when they get in the car. Every child knows where they are going to sit every month. This has gotten rid of the fighting. Any time there's regular fighting over an issue, a regular-rotation chart puts a routine in place and a lot of the fighting diminishes.

When we model how to solve problems, kids learn to solve issues themselves. Kids like to get involved in setting up the chart and the rules. Having discussions about job rotations or others are so important. We're teaching them negotiation skills and how to get along with others in life. Take the time to have little meetings and discussions. They are vital.

Saren's parents taught them the repentance bench method. If kids are fighting or getting physical about something, give them a chance to work it out and then have them sit on the repenting bench if they need help regrouping. At Saren's house, the repentance bench is the bottom step of the stairs.

Siblings have to sit on the repentance bench until they can tell Mom or Dad what they did wrong. Sometimes they don't know what they did wrong, so they can help each other remember. Once they own their own behavior, they can give their sibling a hug and then make it right. They can come up with something to make it right whether it's a hug or a kindness for someone else. They say not only "I'm sorry" but also "Can you forgive me?" It's like a magic eraser for feelings, and as kids do this with small things they can do it with big things. The kids give each other a hug before leaving, even if reluctantly, and it helps dissipate the strong feelings.

Saren will have the kids do their repentance bench method even in the grocery store or in the car. They find a place to sit. They're pretty quick when they are practiced at it and it helps them move on. Saren's prompt is "repentance bench" and the kids know what to do.

April lets her kids solve problems as much as possible, unless there's an obvious need to jump in. As her kids get older she has them use "I" statements such as "I'm feeling upset because..." When her kids have a problem and they come to her, she listens and validates both sides and then gives them trust that they can work it out. She has them use "I" statements with each other, "I felt this way when you did this," and "I felt this way when you did that." April helps the girls to see how the other felt that way and they come up with solutions. This helps her kids work things out more easily.

Using "I" statements instead of casting blame and pointing fingers is an important skill. We can keep brushing things to the side and continue to be annoyed by them or we can take the bull by the horn and make these times of sibling rivalry into teaching opportunities.

We need to be a good example for our kids. If we're yelling at our kids when we're annoyed, we give them license to do the same thing.

If one child is snapping at another April asks, "Are you being as kind as you should be?" After the child answers she encourages a new tone of voice and prompts "Let's try again" so they can practice saying something in a kinder way. As they practice this, they speak more respectfully to each other.

We really do need to model the things we need to help them say and do.

The [Power of Moms Family Systems program](#) is available on the Power of Moms site and is about how to help our children want to behave. Also view the "Show Notes" for links to some very helpful resources and concrete ideas.

[Amy McCready](#) offers resources which are also recommended. She goes really deep on sibling rivalry and offers podcasts and videos.

A lot of squabbling and bickering can be related to being too tired and running too fast. Take a few steps back and evaluate how it feels to be in your home. Evaluate whether a child feels he has a voice, choices and is heard. Why are these kids fighting so much? The answer may be different and personal in your home. Think and pray about reasons behind behavior so you can come up with solutions that are meaningful and long lasting. Look at the "whys" behind things and try to build your family culture and the feeling in your home. Build the love and respect and your kids will be a lot more likely to foster it.

Moms who are listening to this are doing their best. Every day we each learn more on how we can become better moms.

Transcribed by Laurie Brooks