



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of second-grade students

The Power of Peers

Friends. Peers. Popularity. To a second grader, these are becoming increasingly important and will continue to be as the child grows. A child's destiny is influenced in part by the power of peers, or in other words, children of the same age or ability.

Peer Influences

Peers influence each other and contribute to their development of knowledge and skills in a few key ways.

Relationship skills. Children learn about socializing, compromising, dealing with conflicts and putting feelings into words with their peers. In addition, they learn to share conversation and build friendships. Provide opportunities for your child to play with peers and practice these social skills.

Self-image. Earning a place in the group has a real bearing on your child's self-image. The child who succeeds in the world of peers during middle childhood will enter the adolescent years with a more solid sense of self-confidence, enabling the child to better handle relationships. The quantity of friends is not important. What is important is the quality of the relationship developing with friends. Parents can monitor and model healthy relationship skills.

Reality testing. Playmates engage children in learning about the social world and its realities. They share ideas about what is acceptable or not, explore rules and respond to each other's personalities. Playmates provide new ways to play, think, talk and get along. Your child will question you and learn about what you value in friendships. Take the time to answer these important questions.

Functions of Peers

Social support. Peer groups (age-mates, classmates, friends) provide a certain status independent of one's family. They also can be a stabilizing influence during this time of growth and change in a child's life.

Belonging. Peers can provide a positive influence on a child's self-esteem. Being important to someone outside the family unit is a good feeling.



Siblings share a common family experience but often differ in age and personality.



Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Research *cooperative* board games for your family. Everyone comes away feeling like a winner.

Transmit values. Contact with peers exposes children to values different from their parents' views. Realizing that many standards exist in the world is important for children. However, strong family values give a child a good basis for deciding whether to incorporate new and different values into their life.

Shared experience. Peer groups provide an opportunity to practice different roles. Feedback from peers is immediate and can be used to consider and change one's emerging concept of who the child is or wants to become. These children will grow up in the world together sharing history as it unfolds.

Peer influences can be negative or positive. Be involved with your child and his or her friends. Help guide your child toward a positive peer experience.

Sibling Relationships and Rivalry

In addition to interactions with peers, children are affected by their relationships and experiences with siblings. Siblings share a common family experience but often differ in age and personality. Helping children navigate the ups and downs of sibling relationships, especially sibling rivalry, is also important at this age. Imagine the following conversation:

- "Mom! Dad! He's picking on me again!"
- "What?! She started it!"

Sound familiar? If so, you've probably experienced several scenes such as this and are frustrated with the rivalry that occurs among your children. Sibling rivalry is a normal occurrence in families, but parents need to provide guidance and support to minimize negative effects.



Possible Causes of Sibling Rivalry

Temperament. A child may struggle with managing emotions, controlling anger or getting along with others.

Scarcity. A child may feel on the "short end" of something in the family: affection, praise, recognition or other forms of attention.

Lack of environmental control. A child may feel lack of privacy or lack of control over things affecting him or her.

Ways to Handle Rivalry

Stop children if they are fighting angrily or being physically harmful. Allow time for separation, and reinforce the importance of kindness.

Assist children to resolve conflicts they cannot manage themselves. Encourage them to discuss problems and find a solution together.

Recognize the children when they are being nice to each other, such as sharing while playing together. Catch them cooperating!

Arrange special time with each child. Giving each child your undivided attention 10 minutes a day can help overcome feelings of being left out or unimportant.

Private space. If a separate bedroom for each child is impossible, try designating a separate chest of drawers or closet or special space to give each child a sense of control in part of the environment.

Avoid comparing one child to another. Each is an individual and needs to be treated fairly, with no favoritism or labels.

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