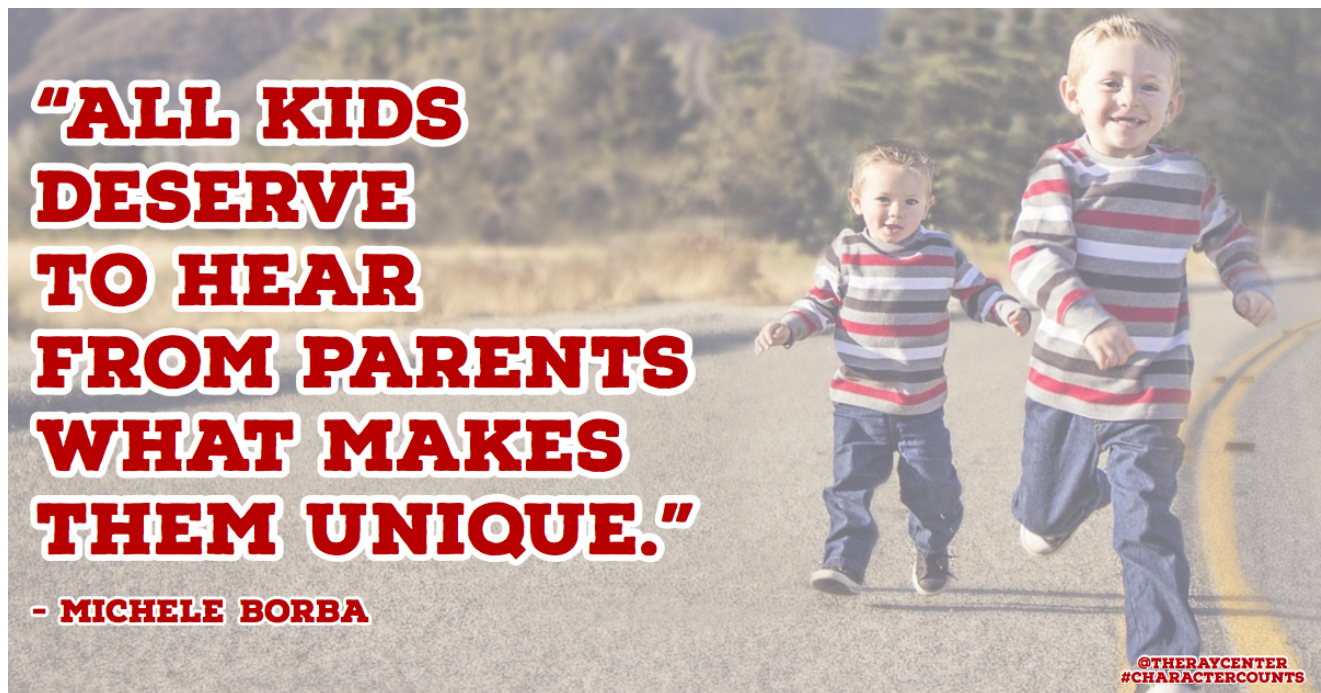


Boosting sibling harmony



From our guest contributor, Michele Borba.

Here are nine tips to guide you in minimizing jealousy and boosting harmony amongst your kids:

Give yourself a reality check

Before you go beating yourself up, take a moment to seriously reflect on how you do treat your kids. A good question to ponder is: "If someone asked your child if you treat your kids fairly, how would he or she respond?"

For instance: Does each kid feel like your favorite? Do you avoid comparing your kids in front of others? Do you provide opportunities for each child to nurture her special talents? Is there one thing you might do to change your behavior or interactions with your children to minimize their feelings of jealousy or rivalry?

Get in your child's shoes

Pretend you really are in the shoes of the child who feels

jealous. How would you feel if you were your kid? How would you act? Is his take on things right? If so, what will you do to change your relationship with this child so he feels just as special in your eyes? Write down your thoughts then commit to making that change happen.

Refrain from comparing behaviors

Never compare or praise one kid's behavior in contrast to a sibling: it can create long-lasting strains. "Why can't you be more like your sister?" "Why aren't you organized like your brother?" All too easily, kids can interpret such comparisons as: "You think he's better than me" or "You love him more." It unfairly puts pressure on the sibling you praised and devalues your other child.

Listen openly to all sides

Listening fairly your kids is not only a powerful way to convey that you respect each child's thoughts and want to hear all sides: "Thanks for sharing. Now I want to hear your brother's side." The key is to build a fair relationship with each sibling so that he or she knows not only that you value each opinion and you're an unbiased listener.

Never compare schoolwork or competencies or athletic behaviors or musical talents or...

Kids should compare their schoolwork, test scores, and report cards only to their own previous work—never to the work of their siblings or friends. Instead of stimulating a child to work harder, comparisons are more likely to fuel resentment.

Avoid using negative labels

Family nicknames like Shorty, Clumsy, or Klutz can cause unfair family ribbings and fuel sibling resentment. "Don't worry, he's just the family klutz"—as well as become daily reminders of incompetence. These kinds of labels often stick

and become difficult to erase, not only within but also outside your family as well. In fact the one rule on labels: Unless the label is helpful or esteem-enhancing, don't use it! Labels create sibling resentment but also become fulfilling prophecies.

Nurture a unique strength for *each* sibling

All kids deserve to hear from parents what makes them unique. Knowledge of that talent nurtures their self-esteem as well as setting them apart from their siblings. Ideally, you should nurture a different strength for each sibling based on natural temperament and interests. Once you identify the talent, find opportunities to cultivate and validate it so each child can be acknowledged for their strength.

Find special alone time with each child

One way to let each child feel treasured is by spending alone just with each parent. Capitalize on those individual moments as they arise: "Your brother's asleep. Let's just you and I go read books together." Or make a date with each sibling to have special time just with you then mark it on the calendar. How frequently you meet is based on what's realistic for your schedule: thirty minutes weekly, ten minutes daily, an hour every other week.

Arrange for another adult to watch other siblings or choose a time when they're gone. "Together" occasions could be: a movie, a walk, lunching at a favorite restaurant, kite flying, an ice cream outing, or just time alone. Then enjoy each other without siblings around—even if it's just five minutes. Say; "This is *our* time."

Reinforce cooperative behavior

Don't overlook one of the simplest ways to boost sibling harmony: catch them supporting each other. The moments may be few and far between, but when they do help, share, cooperate,

and work well together, tell them you appreciate their efforts. They're more likely to repeat the behaviors because they know that's what you want them to do.

Now that you've learned the nine tips how will you use them to achieve long-term change? You might want to take a moment to write down exactly what promise you want to make to yourself and your family. For instance, which simple secret you will commit to doing within the next twenty-four hours to make a real difference in your family? Then don't give up until you get the change you want.

For more information on how to orchestrate sibling harmony, [click here](#).



Dr. Michele Borba is an educational psychologist, parenting expert, TODAY show contributor and author of 22 books including *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges* and *Wildest Worries* and *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*.

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