

Brotherly love



From toy tussles to new baby envy, Supernanny Jo Frost tells you how to ease sibling stress

With her ability to whip confused children into shape and an aptitude for getting through to mums and dads on her hit TV series *Supernanny*, Jo Frost has won the hearts of parents around the world. "Parents see me as a comfort and a confidante," says Jo, 41. "It's nice to know I can help people on such a personal, intimate level." The latest phase in her childcare mission is a new book – *Jo Frost's Toddler SOS* – which tackles a host of parenting dilemmas, from toddler tantrums and potty training, to sleep and development.

One hot topic that Jo is no stranger to is sibling rivalry and the daily tensions between brothers and sisters that can turn the happiest of homes into a battleground. "The relationship between siblings is an incredibly close one, I know from personal experience," she explains. "When my brother and I were little, we used to fight like cat and dog. We both thought we were the alpha! I now know, with hindsight, that those

squabbles were just part of us building a close relationship."

This insight, coupled with her 17 years of childcare experience, means Jo believes she can get to the core of any family feud. "Sibling rivalry can happen because of many things, such as the evolving needs of a toddler, being territorial over toys, looking for fairness and equality, and not to mention

temperament and personality," she explains. "Parents play a major role in how siblings dispute and resolve issues, and it's all about learning when you should intervene."

And she says it's key that mums and dads face up to the meltdowns rather than bury their heads in the sand.

"Most parents want to escape sibling rivalry but you can't. It's part of human nature," Jo explains. "Despite being in the same family, children aren't born knowing how to get along. Putting in strong practices early in life will help them in the long run. And, it's important to remember as they become more mature, these impulses tend to decline."


Jo's worldly wisdom
The beauty of siblings, whether it's two, three, four or five, is that they can create a unit with the ability to support and take care of one another

Why routine matters


Establishing a routine with your children will make them less prone to meltdowns with one another. Start with the fundamentals:

- ★ Have a strong bedtime routine. Toddlers need at least 10-11 hours of sleep each night.
- ★ Schedule your morning routine and make sure you give yourself more time than you need in case a tricky situation arises.
- ★ When it comes to errands, look at the whole week and pace yourself so you have quality time to spend with each child.
- ★ Once you've created the routine, make sure you stick to it.

Here are Jo's suggested solutions to some of the common sibling stresses faced by our readers...

 **My daughters (2, 3 and 5) are always bickering over their toys. I'm sick of refereeing. What should I do?**

JO SAYS You need to figure out what they're bickering over. Have they learnt to share the toys that belong to them all? Are some toys that belong to them individually being played with without permission? Do two of the three play together, making one feel left out? These are all examples of healthy developmental stages of your daughters' bonding and social skills. Of course you will hear 'it's not fair' a lot and that's why you have to get to the bottom of the 'who started it' drama. Here are the facts: your 2 year old is learning right from wrong, your 3 year old has just started to remember it, and your 5 year old knows it and is testing it. My suggestion is that you set clear expectations of behaviour, and any breaking of these rules after a warning will end up with a visit to the naughty step.

 **My toddler is jealous of her new baby brother. I'm always saying 'no' because she's not gentle with him. I certainly can't leave them alone in a room together. How can I help her be kind and enjoy her brother?**

JO SAYS Yes, you absolutely cannot leave your baby alone with your toddler. Your daughter knows that she'll get more of your time if she behaves badly


The sharing toy box technique

Your little ones will be sharing before you know it with this handy game:


- Give each of your children a cardboard box with their name on it.
- Lay out all your children's toys.
- Go through and decide together which toy belongs to who and have the owner put it in their box.
- After all the toys have been sorted, ask each child to choose a toy from their box that they'll share with their siblings.
- When they've successfully shared these toys among themselves for a week, give them another box and label it the 'sharing box'.
- Asks each of them to pick a few toys from their own box that can go into the sharing box, explaining that these will belong to all of them.
- Remember to change the toys in the sharing box every few months.

towards her younger brother. By hurting him, she not only gets your attention, but also expressing her jealousy in the only way she knows how. She feels threatened by all the attention, time and comfort the baby is receiving, but the good news is, this is typically a short-lived phase.

When she does hurt him, instead of being cross, show her that you're disappointed: 'No, that's not how we treat him.' Then, remove her from the baby and tell her she can participate with you both when she behaves. When she does, reward her with praise for being kind. You can also buy her a doll from the baby so she can play at caring for it while you are caring for your son. This will help her feel included while making sure she's getting quality time with you, too.

 **I'm a mum of 18-month-old twins. My son pulls his sister's hair to get a response from me. I've tried talking to him, but it still goes on. Help!**

JO SAYS Whether you have twins or siblings close in age, this bickering behaviour is very common. Here's what your son knows: when he pulls his sister's hair, he gets a reaction from you and her. It's important that he learns from your firm voice that you don't approve of what he's just done. In addition, encourage your twins to show one another lots of love and affection – hugs, kisses and cuddles.

It's common with this age group to see one twin who is slightly more domineering than the other, and a power play takes shape as their personalities begin to form. You would have noticed this even when they were babies, for example, if one cried because he needed feeding the other one would have woken up and cried because she then wanted what the other had. If your twins are sharing toys they will act no differently than any other children their age. One child will always recognise that he can get what he wants by being more dominant. It's vital to encourage your twins to do things both separately and together, as it'll teach them to get along but also have their own autonomy. For example, let them paint a piece of paper together and then alone, and have them share one play chest but dress separately. 

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Jo Frost's Toddler SOS: Solutions for the Trying Toddler Years (£16.99, Orion) is available to buy from 14 March.

