



Some days, I feel more like a referee than a mom and I wonder if I am doing anything right. But then just when I'm on the brink of buying a slew of new parenting books, I overhear my children encouraging one another to continue building the seemingly impossible Lego set, complimenting another on what a good basketball player he is, or reading a story to their baby sister. I catch them holding hands as they walk down the street or running over to check on someone that has fallen to make sure they are okay.

## 1. Teach the Golden Rule

Any Kindergartner can tell you, "Treat others the way you want to be treated." Jesus himself gives us this as the 2nd greatest Commandment in the Gospels (Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31). There is no better place to begin to put this into practice than in the home. God has certainly been intentional in providing us the opportunity to grow in virtue through the gift of siblings. **We learn the virtue of patience when we "take turns" and we learn the value of kindness when we put the needs of our brother or sister before our own.** Siblings are the first people in life that we learn how to love, support, and forgive. It may take many reminders, but help your children to treat one another in a way that honors God.

## 2. Avoid Competition

One of the easiest ways to start conflict in your home is to compare your children to one another. How many times have we heard parents say "If only you were more like your big brother"? Comments like this build resentment and competition amongst brothers and sisters. As parents, we need to help our children embrace the unique gifts that God has placed within each one of them. **Allow our children to realize that God has a plan for their life that is different from even the members in their own family.** Enable them to discover the talents God has given to them by providing opportunities for them to play sports, succeed academically or become involved in the arts. We teach our kids to find joy in one another's accomplishments. If someone gets an A+ or a scores a touchdown, the entire family celebrates them. We remind them that another person's

accomplishments does not take away from our own. Kids can also get competitive over our time. Schedule one on one time with each of your children as often as you can. The individual time with you allows their relationship with one another to flourish. They grow confident in the bond they have with you and are not threatened by the possibility of sibling taking that away.

### 3. Make Memories together

Be intentional about providing opportunities for fun with your family. Vacations, family game nights, or even walks together can build and strengthen the relationship between siblings. These are the things they will talk about and laugh about in years to come. One family we know planned a picnic to the beach during a cold Ohio winter. At the time, the kids thought that mom was crazy, but now they love retelling the story of bundling up six kids and sitting in piles of snow while they ate lunch. Traditions that might sound odd often end up to be the most cherished. Take some time to plan out these types of activities for your children. Thinking about what you may have enjoyed doing as a young child with your parents or grandparents is a great place to start.

### 4. Be the example: Our children's eyes are always upon us

My five year old, having overheard a phone conversation I was having with my husband, came to me and said, "Did I just hear you call dad 'Stupid'?" I humbly had to admit that, although I didn't intend for it to come across that way, I had indeed used the word stupid. That moment was the perfect opportunity to be the example for my son. I told him that what I said was wrong. I apologized to him. I called my husband and apologized to him while my son listened intently. We all mess up. Husbands and wives argue. Brothers and sisters argue. **The problem is not so much the disagreements, but the way we handle them.** Model a repentance, forgiveness and mercy to your children. This is crucial in the bond for siblings. Parents must be the example of Christ's love in the home.

### 5. Prayer

Are you praying for the relationships of your children with one another? Satan is a destroyer of families. He wants nothing more than to tear apart that lifelong bond of support and strength. **Protect this essential relationship in the lives of your kids with prayer. Ask the Lord to help them overcome their differences.** Pray that the foundation of their friendship is the love of God. Establish family prayer times so that your children can begin to pray with and for one another. If you can't do a whole rosary, start with a decade or even just one Hail Mary. It won't take long to see the fruits of family prayer in the relationship of your children.

Although it is trying and difficult at times, give your children the gift of a strong sibling

relationship by creating the right environment in your home. These are friendships that will truly last a life time. It is well worth the time and effort it takes to help your children form a good relationship rooted in Christ.