

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My 8 and 5 year-old children are not close at all. How can I help them get closer?

ANSWER: **Sibling closeness is best fostered from birth** and is cemented in the first 4-5 years of a child's life. It is not too late to help them, but it will be far more difficult with varying results. With many of today's children in Day Care with lots of non-siblings, and because of the over-scheduled life-styles of many families, young children are missing the key ingredient to help bond siblings. That ingredient is **lots of time exclusively with siblings**. Children who spend the first 4 to 5 years of their lives playing, arguing, compromising, praying, reading and doing chores with their siblings have the **time and opportunity** to develop a close relationship. Once siblings are separated at school, this window of opportunity shrinks rapidly. It will be hard to keep this window open at this point in their lives, but here are a few suggestions:

1. Create and maintain family activity nights...not T.V., not just existing in the same room, but interactive activities. Turn off the computer!
2. Have same sex siblings share a bedroom and bathroom. (I know you can afford to give your kids their own bedroom and bath, that's not the point.) Create a situation where they **have to** talk, argue, compromise, play, share and forgive. Experiential learning is always the most effective. You are not only bonding siblings, but you are providing opportunities to learn important life skills.
3. Pray together as a family every (yes, every) night. Have your kids share their thank-yous and then pray for each other's needs. Have everyone snuggle in Dad and Mom's bed. **In bonding the whole family together with God, you bond siblings too.**
4. Create and utilize projects which get the kids working and problem solving together...especially projects that help others.
5. Give the older sibling the opportunity to be responsible for the younger sibling.
6. Seek out family "adventure" opportunities where there is an **element of risk** and where there is **dependency on each other**. (e.g. camping, backpacking, climbing, boating, exploring etc.) Avoid anything that plugs in!
7. Involve kids in the planning of special "surprises" for their siblings. Find "goofy" things to do. Your kids will both love and remember them.
8. Have siblings attend each other's performing events.
9. Find opportunities for siblings to teach a skill to the other.
10. Remember back to anything that bonded you to your siblings and use it!

You must believe that bonding your kids to each other and to the family will reap lifelong rewards. Can that be said of everything else we stuff into our children's lives? I'm thrilled you understand the importance of asking this question.

Jack Lipski, M.A.
SOTHCS Counselor
(Permission to copy granted for personal use only.)