

*My children are so competitive with each other! It drives me mad. They even have to race to the door to beat each other to let people in to the house! They complain whenever they see the other as getting some advantage. Why are they so ungenerous?*

It's not unusual for siblings to compete with each other for their parents' attention as well as for their share of resources. Competition can be worse if one or more of the children are feeling a bit insecure. When a child isn't confident of his value he may try to undermine a sibling with put downs or fight hard for those things which seem to confirm his value such as coming first in races, even to open the front door!

Reduce competition between siblings by:

- not comparing them to each other, positively or negatively
- never getting them to race against each other
- not taking sides - encourage them to devise strategies to manage conflicts
- building each child's self-esteem- they will have less need to measure themselves against their siblings
- praising positive interactions between the siblings, or even the absence of fighting
- providing opportunities to have fun and work together –this will help siblings see the point of each other
- scheduling 1:1 time with you so that they can be confident that they will have your full attention sometimes
- giving each child what they need at that point in their lives rather than worrying about giving to each equally. So if one child needs more support with school work then you don't need to give that to all the children
- empathising if one child feels they are getting less attention
- having one jar in which you post tokens like pasta pieces to record good behaviours of all the children. When the jar is full do a fun activity together
- focusing more on children's efforts than achievements and reducing focus on winning generally.

*I have a daughter who is nearly 10 yrs old. I ask her to do something & she says wait or she says have patience. What should I be saying to her when I want her to do something like have a bath?*

All human beings need some power in their lives to feel happy. Children don't have a lot of power as the adults make most of the decisions. This is appropriate as we have more mature brains and a great deal more experience. Left to their own devices kids might choose never to shower or do homework or wear a coat or to spend far more time on screens or stay up later or eat more sweets than we think is healthy. So we decide for them.

But children need practice making decisions. So we need to let them make decisions wherever they can. They can't choose whether to brush their teeth but

they can choose where and when and how to brush them. Giving them a little bit of power makes them feel less controlled and more willing to do what we want them to do.

Children are willing to give up on what they want and do what we want when the relationship between us is positive. So we need to work on motivating our children by giving them lots of positive messages about how we value them, ie lots of descriptive praise. We also need to spend positive time with them doing fun things like playing games, cooking or walking the dog and chatting.

When giving instructions, go to your child and talk positively to her. Once she looks at you, praise her and then give the instruction, ONCE only. Then praise any steps she takes in the right direction. Sometimes she won't want to do what you ask so you'll need to empathise, while remaining firm.

*My older son's behaviour (he's 12 and quite behind emotionally and academically) had been awful recently. He had been extremely rude, swearing, kicking, breaking things, ordering us about, refusing to go to bed, shouting etc. We started using the pasta jar to acknowledge his good behaviour and it's having a great effect with lots more cooperation. However... my younger son (9) who is very bright and wise for his years, is getting jealous. We have been rewarding my older son with pasta when he has been doing something that the younger one does routinely. What should we do?*

It can be hard being the sibling of a child with special needs. A child with needs absorbs a lot of adult attention and others in the family may feel overlooked. This needs to be acknowledged. Empathise with your younger son's desire for attention. He is not wrong for wanting attention but give him attention for things that are a bit of a stretch for him.

Your two boys are unique and different with different strengths and temperaments. Your older boy has not yet developed certain habits and behaviours that your younger son has so you are praising him for things his younger sibling is doing as a matter of course. That's just fine as we need to treat our children uniquely according to their needs and not necessarily the same as each other. You wouldn't give your younger son glasses just because his older brother needed them!

Your younger son will also be doing many things that are praise-worthy. Think about the positive qualities and characteristics that he is showing - is he mature, sensible, a problem solver, solution-focused? Look for examples of these characteristics in his behaviour and mention them.

I would have one pasta jar for all the children in the family to encourage them to support each other. Set it up so that when the jar is full the kids can do a fun activity together with you so they are all motivated to contribute. If your younger

boy notices something his brother does well he can tell you and get a pasta for himself as well as for his brother. This promotes team work.

*When I was a kid my parents gave us 'what for' if we stepped out of line. I didn't dare put a foot wrong. How do I get my child to respect me the way I respected them?*

Of course you want your kids to respect you and many people fear that respect has disappeared in children. It sounds like the way you're measuring respect is by children doing what they're told. We do need our kids to cooperate and we want them to behave well, although sometimes they'll slip up and sometimes they'll want to do things their own way.

If you were brought up with a style of parenting that involved using force and fear it's not surprising that you would equate fear with respect.

I would ask you to consider that respect can be gained without fearing the parent. Fear makes it difficult for kids to learn in fact. When we are afraid our brains are awash with the stress chemical, cortisol, and this shuts down our hearing, our peripheral vision and the parts of our brains that deal with understanding. We have evolved this way to enable us to get out of dangerous situations fast. So we can fight or flee but we can't really learn much when we're afraid. So fear won't help our children learn how to behave, which is our goal.

Children will do what parents require out of fear but not when the adult isn't present. When there is self-discipline the child does the right thing even when no one else is there.

If we want our children to do the right thing we need to earn their respect by showing them respect and being firm and consistent. Have clear rules and tell them when they get things right. And hold them accountable when they don't with logical and fair consequences.