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SCHOOL TOOLS

MAY 2022

TWO WORDS: SUMMER BREAK!

We are at the end of another school year! The upcoming months will bring some much-needed time off of school and with family for many. We know the academic year can be stressful on kids, teens and parents. It is often challenging to balance schoolwork with extracurricular activities, family events, and social circles. Parents may find themselves putting in hours after work as their child's fill-in tutor (sometimes in subjects they haven't brushed up on since elementary school!), and trying to navigate their own responsibilities and self-care with their child's schedule.

Despite the summer being a carefree time for most, it sometimes comes with its own set of barriers -- finding childcare while parents work, keeping children supervised, learning, and stimulated, and the dreaded fact that children will now be home 24/7 with siblings, and will likely be in conflict with one another at some point. If this last example sounds like your family, read along for some tips to keep your summer more relaxed and enjoyable for all.

What is an "I Feel" Statement?

When we are in conflict, often times our defenses go up. We lash out and blame others out of anger, hurt and disappointment. This tends to turn the conversation even more sour -- the other person then becomes defensive themselves. Here is an example of an "I Feel" statement prompt to utilize instead:

"I feel _____
when you _____
because _____,
so could you please _____?"

Everyone (kids AND adults) can practice this in moments of conflict to illustrate their feelings without placing blame.

MANAGING SIBLING CONFLICT AT HOME

"Why can't you two just get along?!"

"You're driving me crazy!"

"I don't care who started it, you're both in trouble!"

...Sound familiar? If so, you probably know that sibling rivalry can push parents to their breaking point at times. It can be frustrating, exhausting, and upsetting to see your child acting in a way that doesn't fit the image of how you believe they should treat others.

Both parenting and mental-health experts agree: sibling rivalry is normal, and potentially even inevitable. So, instead of parents blaming themselves, assuming it is a representation of their parenting skills, they can instead focus on how to assist in managing or dissipating the conflict when it does occur.

Big Life Journal, a mental health program for kids and parents, states that sibling rivalry can stem from a number of things: jealousy, competition, conflicting needs or temperaments, age differences, to seek attention from a parent, or sometimes just out of boredom.

Big Life Journal gives seven tips to parents hoping to manage sibling rivalry this summer:

1. **Establish family rules.** Collaborate with your children to post clear rules and minimize conflict, i.e. no hitting or asking before using something.
2. **Define family values.** Create a family manifesto to highlight these values.
3. **Encourage and model empathy and kindness.** Celebrate when you see your children using these skills!
4. **Model healthy conflict-resolution skills.** Teach your kids to take turns explaining and use "I feel" statements (as shown above), rather than blaming.
5. **Let them problem-solve.** Give them a minute to problem-solve themselves (and for you to gather your own composure) before attempting to intervene.
6. **Teach calming strategies.** Identify their coping strategies and implement these when needed.
7. **Teach assertiveness.** Teach the difference between being assertive and aggressive in arguments.