

Parenting at Lockdown

Parenting 0-2 year olds

In urban scenarios as well as in nuclear families with working parents who have to work from home on their PCs and laptops – parents are struggling as no house help is available to take care of their kids and house too; there are no creches around or play schools open to engage the kids for some time. So the “millennial” parents are facing a novel crisis of engaging their children 24*7.

For parents of 0-2 year olds, we have different scenarios. Some mothers are homemakers, some had just started with Work from Home and some had unwillingly got back to office because their leaves were exhausted, but now are happy to be back home with work and kid together! But, still the challenge of engaging the kid persists and is more or less similar in all these aforementioned situations

The good news in these times of lockdown is that the team of “PARENTS” has just got stronger, because fathers too are there at home full time! Hence, as a team you can tackle the situation better! There is a chance for sharing of responsibilities. Parents can divide some household duties as well as care giving duties for the child amongst themselves like bathing the child, feeding the child (this is for >6 month old babies, because up to 6 months of age, exclusive breastfeeding is recommended), changing clothes, diapers etc. This shall reduce the burden on working mothers as well as homemakers and also shall increase the involvement of the fathers with the child. For fathers, this work from home is a blessing in disguise and hence they should grab this opportunity of spending more time with their kid; something they must have missed while being in the office for they couldn't get enough paternal leaves (even if they wished for it) unlike their spouse.

How to spend quality time with your kid(0-2 years of age)

First two years of life form an integral part of first 1000 days concept of World Health Organization! During these 24 months, more than 80% of brain growth and development occurs! Hence, this is a crucial phase of child development, where a newborn who is completely dependent on the mother for its needs, grows to become a 2 year old who can walk independently, talk in short sentences, eat independently (although messy) and can even express his personal and emotional needs to some extent. As parents, this is the time when we ought to ensure that child gets enough stimulation and opportunity to develop all the skills which are required to become this talking, walking and cute naughty 2 year old!

Following are some of the important areas which should be focused on while engaging the kids at home (24*7) in times of lockdown and beyond

1. Talk with your child: The most important of all is **TALK!!** Talk to your child from morning daily routines of getting up to bathing, dressing, feeding, toileting until bedtime at night. Talk in slow speed, with a little high pitch voice with lots of facial expressions, gestures and animated noises for your kid to absorb! This kind of speech is called "Infant directed speech". Talk about things around the child, objects, toys, about animals, birds, and so on!

2. Play with your child: Playing with your child with undivided attention. You can engage in various activities that promote bodily movements and thus enhance the child's gross motor development. Activities involving climbing stairs up and down, creating an obstacle course for your kid who has just started walking independently, some rough housing with the pillows and mattresses, involving the baby in clean up of scattered toys all over the house, creating a bedtime schedule with your kid's favourite soft toy and so on. Kids are very good at imitating, involve your kid in your exercise routine and see how your yoga, push ups and work out become enjoyable for both of you!

Some of the suggested websites to read about these activities and explore the world of different play activities for 0-2 year olds are as follows:

<https://www.babycenter.ca/c25004199/lets-play-fun-games-for-you-and-baby>

<http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie/activities/0-2>

<https://activeforlife.com/activities-for-babies-and-toddlers/>

While engaging in play, promote bilateral use of hands to develop fine motor skills. Sit with your kid, give crayons to scribble, use finger paints, give flour/atta dough, blow bubbles and get involved in some messy play

3. Tummy time: Tummy time plays an important role in infants less than 1 year old. It creates opportunities for developing fine motor skills of the baby, as the baby is comfortably lying on the tummy and has his hands free to grab, hold or even throw toys, blocks etc. It shall help in strengthening the core muscles of the trunk too, as the baby crawls on his stomach to reach for objects.

4. Feeding Time: Feeding time can be a big time of struggle between the parents and child. Introducing complimentary foods and weaning the baby gradually from breastfeeding is a big mission in most houses. So to deal with introducing complimentary feeding at 6 months and above- some thumb rules are to be followed:

- Fixed schedule for feeding- introduce one food item per week at a scheduled time daily for at least 8-10 days, before declaring it as disliked by the infant
- Variety is more important than quantity, as the baby is still breastfed and not completely dependent on this new food

- Go from liquids to semi solid to solid foods gradually
- Introduce finger foods once the child is able to accept solid food and can sit independently
- Promote responsive feeding- Do not force feed the child. Let the child play and be messy with the food. Feeding time is a chance to talk, tell stories, too
- NO SCREENS while eating. No cartoons, No nursery rhymes, No videos

Since, breastfeeding is recommended at least up to 2 years of age, weaning the baby completely from breast feeding should be tried after around 20-22 months of age. Decrease daytime feeds first, then shift your focus on night time feeds.

Reading Time: There is no minimum age to start reading. Reading to babies as young as six months of age leads to stronger vocabularies and better early literacy skills at 4 years of age. And hence, variety of books is available in the market like cloth books, touch and feel books, board books and so on. But, right now, during the lock down since we can't buy a book, **LETS MAKE A BOOK !!** You can use some A4 papers, colors, newspapers to get cut outs of vehicles, birds, objects, food items etc. Make a scrapbook for your kid! What a fun way to introduce picture books to your kid!! 10-15 minutes of reading time daily can lead to huge developmental advancements in your child's language as well as cognition. It is the best way to enlarge your child's world because books can take you places!!!

Hence, Read, Read, Read...Read with your child, read to your child because **children are made readers on the laps of their parents**. Some book suggestions for 0-2 year old, which can be downloaded and read are as follows;

<https://www.eklavya.in/books/flip-books/flip-books-in-English>

https://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Kindle-Store-Childrens-eBooks/zgbs/digital-text/155009011/ref=zg_bs?encoding=UTF8&tf=1

6. Screen Time: As we have discussed about spending time with the kids and engaging them, an important issue to be taken into consideration is **SCREEN TIME**. In these times of lock down and social distancing, there is a need to stay connected with outside world, get updates of current happenings, get in touch with our family and relatives and also entertain ourselves out of boredom. The answer to all these requirements is one and only one- Gadgets or technology or Screen time! The smart phone has something for everyone! Hence, there is VOOT KIDS, YOUTUBE KIDS and many other apps promoting use of screens for our kid too!! But, exposing the children of age less than 2 years of age to screen time can be harmful to the child's development and excessive exposure has been associated with speech and language delays, decreased socialization, behavioural problems, hyperactivity and even sleep issues! **As**

per American Academy of paediatrics guidelines- NO amount of screen time (including background TV) is recommended upto 24months of age

SO what can be done to avoid SCREEN TIME

- Use audio-radio,music apps,etc
- Talk.Sing to your child. Your child deserves to be talked to
- **Limit usage of screen for video calls only.**
- **No screen time during meals.** Follow this rule for yourself, and it shall be easy to implement for the whole family.

Stop your own use of screens 1 hour prior to sleep.

7. Time for self– Let your infant enjoy time with self too. Too much of stimulation or attention also affects the kid, as kid becomes completely dependent on outside world for fulfilment of his/her needs. This can bring up behavioural problems too. In 24 hours of a day, if you leave your child for some time (say start with 10 minutes) with nothing specific to do, its this time that child shall learn to explore, be creative and be observant. It is in this time you can notice what your kid does, what the kid experiments and what your kid enjoys!! Hence, 'me time' is itself a good way of engaging your kid. To sum up, this is how parents can engage their kid in the times of lockdown with no place to go, no gardens to visit and no play dates to entertain.

Engaging 3-4 year old children

The 3-6 year old children always want to explore everything, the swings, the slide, the soil, the way a football goes up after a kick, and so on. These kids are still dependent on their parents. From the corner of their eye, they keep a watch whether their mom is looking for them or not! If someone offers them a food item or something, the child looks for an affirmation from his/her parents before accepting the offered. Thus they are not yet completely independent individuals, but are also not as dependent on their parents as an infant or a toddler. They are exploring, they are learning and they are growing up! And now, all because of the CORONA pandemic, these young explorers are trapped at home because of the LOCK DOWN. They are not able to go out and explore objects, people and behaviours! No play school, no pre-school, no crèche and no gardens! Just think about a researcher whose research has been put to a halt because of lack of funds!!! Exactly, that's the feeling your child has right now!

Early childhood i.e. 3 to 6 year olds is a period of child development where they develop more refined motor skills, become more self controlled and self sufficient. Their make believe play blossoms. They

start relating their experiences like travelling in a train, going to a fun fair etc, in their imaginative play. You find a 4 year old getting ready for office or preparing tea for the dolls in his/her play. Their thought and language expands at an astounding pace; they start using difficult words, phrases and can even tell short stories, a sense of morality starts developing, they start understanding terms like 'good' or 'bad' and initiate friendships!

These children are in the 3rd stage of Erikson's Psychosocial stage where children are learning to take initiative, explore and if parent's support this sense of purpose of their child, a sense of ambition and responsibility develops. However, if too much self control is demanded at this age by the parents may lead the child to excessive guilt, thus affecting the self esteem of the child. This age group represents the Pre operational stage of Cognitive development as theorized by Piaget. And make believe play forms the most important part of their development in all domains- motor, language, cognitive and social too! It is this makes believe play which strengthens the memory, sustained attention and logical reasoning. It highlights the imagination and creativity of the child. Imaginative play creates an opportunity for the child to understand emotions and reflect on one's own thinking. Child starts taking another's perspective too. They say children are born creative, but 98% cease to be creative as they become adults! Hence, we the 98% not creative adults find it difficult to engage these young explorers and creative minds. So while dealing with this age group we would like to focus on two major areas. First, activities for the children and second, general guidelines for parents while handling them.

Following are the ways in which you can engage your children (3-6 years) at home during these times of lockdown and beyond;

1. Play: Have you ever wondered why the schools of 3-6 year olds are called PLAY schools? What does the term "Kindergarten" mean? It means children's garden!! And what to do children do in gardens? Play. Exactly, this is the reason these schools are called play schools. PLAY is the single most important occupation of children. Play is the work of childhood. Albert Einstein has rightly said "Play is the highest form of research." It is through play that children are learning, experimenting, creating and thinking! While playing with your child, provide your child with realistic materials like toy car, dolls, cooking utensils etc and also provide materials with no clear function like blocks, blank papers, sand etc. The combination of these shall bring out the creativity in your child's play.

Gross Motor Activities:

- You can engage your child in hopping, jumping, wheelbarrow walks, skipping, animal walks,(crab walk, elephant walk, frog jump etc) alphabet yoga and animal poses (cat, frog, rabbit etc).

- Activities involving a series of action commands, obstacle courses spanning all the rooms of the house, balloon toss using both hands fists, alphabet bull's eye and so on promote gross motor skills.
- At least 30 minutes to 1 hour of physical activity per day is a must for children.

Fine motor activities

- Activities like opening bottles, squeezing, punching holes, lacing, beading, finding buttons in clay dough or Atta dough, putting coins in piggy bank etc can help in refining the fine motor skills of the child.
- They help in developing hand grip, handedness, hand coordination and hand and finger strength
- Do not force a left handed child to right handedness. It's going to do no good to the child. And being left handed is absolutely fine!! Many geniuses and creative people have been left handed

Art and Craft

- Involve the child in some art activities like craft, origami, etc. Start with as simple as a boat, dog, house out of colored papers.
- You can make a collage using bits of newspaper. For example, draw a large mango on an A4 paper, and then find yellow color on the newspaper, tear those bits, and stick them.
- Use different types of stickers and help your child decorate his/her name.
- Let your child scribble, draw, color different objects. Let the child go by his imagination and creativity. Do not try to limit the child by making him follow the conventions like blue sky, green plants etc. If your child wants a PINK SKY...so be it!

Activities promoting Pre writing and early literacy skills

These children are learning to write, learning alphabets, numbers, colors, shapes etc

- Paper pencil activities like mazes, find the difference, join the dots, find the odd man out, alphabet search, number search are very useful.
- For these, many online worksheets are available. Also, magazines like Magic Pot, Read and Color, also have similar activities!
- At home, during daily activities like arranging utensils in kitchen rack, putting clothes for laundry etc you can practice counting, identifying colors, and shapes with your kid.
- Use finger paints, crayons, sand, Atta to help your child trace alphabets and numbers and thus learn and enjoy in messy play!

Activities to promote Cognitive skills:

- Teach the child concepts like big and small, more and less using toys, food items and other objects
- Give sorting activities.
- Play dumb charades with your child to teach him about various emotions, actions, weather conditions, adjectives, etc.
- Create riddles and play guess who, make a treasure hunt for your child using clues like- red objects or round objects etc
- Blind fold your child and let the child identify objects given in his/her hand or ask him/her to identify the sounds of animals, objects that you make.
- Play games like copy me -these stimulate imitation, attention and right and left differentiation also.
- Jigsaw puzzles are big cognitive exercise. If you don't have jigsaw puzzles, you can make one at home. Select a picture of animal, cartoon etc, paste it on a card board, cut it into 4 pieces and the puzzle is ready. You can gradually increase the difficulty level by increasing the number of pieces as the child starts enjoying it. Or you can even use the front side of a Cornflakes box or Choco's box and divide it into pieces to make a puzzle.
- Board games like snakes and ladders; ludo, carom, Jenga etc help in understanding rules and turn taking
- Memory games, Ring toss also can engage and stimulate the creative minds!

2. Reading Time and Story time: This lockdown period can turn out to be a great opportunity for you to develop the habit of reading in your child. It promotes child and parent bonding where you can open the whole world of possibilities for your child. Joseph Addison has rightly said "Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body". And hence a child who reads will become an adult who thinks! Daily reading for 10-15 minutes can add up to exposure to more than 1 million words in a year. Reading daily with the child can enhance general knowledge, vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency and spellings! Children's books actually contain 50% more rare words than prime time television. So we have to make the wise choice. Even if you are not yourself into reading regularly, start with your kid now! It's never too late !!

Story time is actually a part of reading time but it can be made more interesting by asking questions about the story during and after the story; Creating situations and asking the child what he/she

would have done; bring a twist by asking the child to ring the bell as the names of the characters appear in the story or just weave a story with your child line after line!

3. Self help skills or Activities of daily living– This is the age to learn toilet training, to undress and dress up, eating by self, brushing teeth, tying shoe laces and so on. These are called self help skills. Give opportunity to your child to do these activities even though you feel the kid won't be able to do them properly. In our Indian culture, parents have an inclination of doing things for their child out of love and affection, but then that child doesn't develop these essential self help skills by 6 years of age and hence in later ages is still dependent. So you can use this lockdown period to focus on any one self help skill and help and motivate the child in doing that. Use rewards like stars to reinforce the desired behaviour.

4. Social stories: As we are practicing social distancing, the opportunities for socialization are minimum for these children. And since this is the age when children socialize, make friends, learn social skills, they are indeed missing out! So, as parents you can make social stories with your child, where you can take scenarios like, visiting a friend's place, going to the doctor, going for a haircut, going to the movies, what to do when hurt, etc. Then using colors, papers and framing some single line sentences, a story book can be made. This can be useful in making the child understand various situations, the social skill needed, the kind of behaviour expected in the scenarios. So even though in lockdown, you can help your children develop social skills.

These stories later on can be used just prior to the situation also, thus helping the child reduce the anxiety of unknown, because most of the times when we take our child out, we do not convey where we are going and what is expected of him/her over there; and then suddenly we find the child being anxious or misbehaving in the social scenario.

So in this way, you can do variety of activities with your child at home, all you have to do is using some creativity and imagination!

Now let's focus on some general guidelines for parents while handling their children.

1. *Catch your child being good.* We as parents take our child's good behaviour for granted and hence do not acknowledge. But praising the child and acknowledging good behaviours can reinforce the behaviour and also increase the child's self esteem
2. *Be consistent.* Both parents as well as the grandparents (if staying together) should be on same page regarding child's behaviour. If child gets different responses for same behaviour from the mother or father or grandparents, kid is smart enough to manipulate and get things done as per his/her will.

3. *Keep promises.* If promised a reward for a good behaviour, ensure that you give that reward. Hence, rewards which are doable should only be promised. Rewards like pat on the back, praise, stickers, stars, small toys, play time with parents etc are advisable. Similarly, if any punishment or denial of privileges was promised for not obeying or for misbehaviour, it should be executed. However, any type of physical punishment is not recommended.
4. *Provide good models/lead by example.* Children are very observant. They pick up habits of parents without being taught to. Hence, if you wish to develop a habit, ensure that you lead it by setting an example. Some good models of values like kindness, honesty, cleanliness can be taught in real life settings as well as through story books
5. *Label the act not the child.* If child misbehaves, do not label the child as bad boy or bad girl, rather label the act done by the child as bad. This is very important to develop self esteem of the child. Also, explain why the act is bad or wrong and what was expected from the child.
6. *Give responsibility to the child.* Simple tasks of bringing a water bottle from the kitchen, to taking help of your child in caregiving of the younger sibling can boost up the self esteem.
7. *Give positive directions and clear commands to your child.* Limit setting is a must. There should be a balance between child listening to your commands and you fulfilling child's demands. Too much of permissiveness will lead to temper tantrums and behavioural issues. Too much of control can decrease the confidence of the child and even sow the seeds of shame and guilt.
8. *Quality time or Child Directed time:* This is that time of the day, where you do not tell your child what to do, but rather your child chooses what to do and you be just a part of the activity without being judgemental, without giving instructions to the child. Spend 10-15 minutes of a day with the child this way, and you shall notice your child's independent thinking, creativity and interests. This is a chance to build up that bond and confidence between you two, so that your child knows when in need you will be there without judgement.
9. *Screen time–* As per American Academy of Paediatrics, for children 2-5 year old, not more than 60 minutes of adult directed screen time is recommended. That means, the parent should be actively involved while viewing on screen, and should involve the child in interaction while watching. Parents should themselves choose the content and shouldn't allow passive and independent watching of videos, songs and games! Studies have shown that excessive screen time can lead to delay in language acquisition and usage, delay in motor skills due decreased opportunity of physical activity, decreased imagination and creativity, lower parental involvement, hyperactivity, aggression, reduced sleep, poor sleep quality , unhealthy eating habits, obesity and poor social

skills. Hence, limit screen time exposure, provide good models by decreasing your own use of screens, and follow no screen in bedroom, no screen during meals and no screen 1 hour prior to sleep.

10. *Sleep Hygiene*– Holidays affect the sleeping habits of kids badly. No set bedtime, late morning awakenings, screen exposure before sleep all these affect the behaviour and activity of the child during the day. Hence, even though holidays are there, set bedtime has to be a rule, child's bedroom should be quiet and dark, follow bedtime routines like brushing teeth, bath, reading story etc. Physical activity during the day helps in having a good sleep at night. Avoid caffeine (which is present in colas, chocolates etc) in the evening, as it can delay sleep.

So to sum up, in these times of lockdown, the magic 8 ways of engaging the 3-6 year olds at home are

1. Use activities that promote motor skills, pre writing and early literacy skills and cognitive skills of the child.
2. Take the help of art and craft
3. Include story time and reading time in daily schedule
4. Focus on self help skills and build it up
5. Introduce social stories
6. Spend quality time or Child Directed time daily for at least 15-20 minutes
7. Screen time not more than one hour per day
8. Maintain sleep hygiene.

Some play links for 3-6 year old children

<http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie/activities/3-4>

<http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie/activities/5-7>

Some useful YOUTUBE links for activities for 3-6 year old children

<https://youtu.be/5rb8Dyfn0js>

<https://youtu.be/54RJ2100P3>

<https://youtu.be/rX91C141q5g>

<https://youtu.be/YDOgjH7KPOA>

<https://youtu.be/95QUIKY0fyE>

<https://youtu.be/wqDowbdG-GI>

<https://youtu.be/P1afQlqqTh8>

https://youtu.be/XyqyzJ5_ucc

<https://youtu.be/NF7D2Ni9bzQ>

<https://youtu.be/edr2aL9Mjys>
<https://youtu.be/biNDaZCOAnM>
<https://youtu.be/D4AfT0OGB8Y>
<https://youtu.be/NB6NW868CqU>
<https://youtu.be/aHVR2FnTpdK>
<https://youtu.be/kjCzlpDVtUw>
<https://youtu.be/hbqKH6fDxd4>
<https://youtu.be/vYELX0MhcTs>
<https://youtu.be/NrvmC5otcBE>
<https://youtu.be/8yuTahgoygM>
<https://youtu.be/istYEYSpLE>
https://youtu.be/vlgxmm_MebE
<https://youtu.be/vTH2FfoJBkM>
<https://youtu.be/aMQUn0ObVc0>
<https://youtu.be/FwdzRYbBh00>
<https://youtu.be/smwfiZd8HLc>
<https://youtu.be/qJNSOte9h4I>
<https://youtu.be/lUsbK04TdgQ>
<https://youtu.be/wLOYIcHMMMg>
<https://youtu.be/Q9u3vmMaVAc>
<https://youtu.be/EBQihqSYEk8>
https://youtu.be/A_WCJ1bX6ll
https://youtu.be/YseOZpS_ZAc
<https://youtu.be/aZsgJg10SNk>

Engaging 7-11 year olds: In times of Lockdown

Who is the busiest member of your family? Moms: working at home as well as in office?? Or DADs: having meetings, dropping kids to school, taking grandma to the doctor? Or your 9-10 year old champ, who has a packed schedule from morning till night! School, tuition, karate class or basketball class on weekdays, art class on weekends, homework to finish with, exams to tackle, friends to meet and so on! And somehow in all this, squeezing time to sleep too!! Yes, these school age children are the busiest member of the family. But for this busiest member, suddenly summer holidays have arrived early! That

too without giving exams; and these holidays are going to be for long! But, because of the lockdown, we are not able to engage our kids into various outdoor activities like sports, dance, art class etc which we conveniently do in summers!! Because of the lockdown, these children are unable to hang out with their friends and peers! And so, being at home 24*7, sometimes there is friction between parent and child, sometimes they are getting bored and sometimes they are driving us crazy.

So it's a full house.

It is for this very reason, we are trying to give you some parenting tips: In times of Lockdown to help you out in knowing and understanding your children better and thus managing them effortlessly!

Children of age group 7-11 years form the part of middle to late childhood. Their physical growth slows down; their gross motor and fine motor skills have developed well by now. However, they show tremendous growth in language, cognitive, social, moral and emotional domains of development. They develop better communication, conversation and narrative skills. They generally spend more time in social settings like school, playground, art class etc. and hence spend more time with friends than parents!! With peers they are learning to cooperate and work together agreeably and collectively. They start developing their identity! The magical, egocentric and inflexible thinking found in less than 6 year old children, is gradually replaced in these school age children by flexible logical reasoning. They are ready to grasp mathematical concepts of numbers like addition, subtraction, multiplication. They can interpret mass, weight, length etc and develop spatial reasoning thus understanding geographical directions too. They are able to classify and categorize things, situations and ideas by focusing on several aspects of a problem and this helps them in problem solving and getting organized.

Thus as we see these children are on a journey of tremendous growth in different domains of development; hence, while engaging them at home and letting them strike off their boredom, parents should focus on 8 areas.

1. Have a schedule: Even though these are holidays, have a schedule for your child, since, there are no schools or activity classes to keep them busy, lack of a timetable is likely to increase unproductive activities like watching TV, sulking because of boredom and snacking food! Sit down with your child, and make a schedule for the next day. Make schedules on a daily basis. Include regular bedtime and waking time; time for screen, time for reading, physical activity etc. Schedules bring discipline, increase productivity and promote better utilization of time.
2. Eating habits: Many children have a habit of communicating their boredom by telling their moms every few hours- that they are hungry! And want something to eat or drink. Staying indoors, reduced opportunity of physical activity and boredom is likely to increase calorie

consumption of these children. It becomes difficult for parents also to fulfil the demands by cooking something or the other. Thus, in such scenarios it is likely that we as parents take the aid of packaged food items or ready to eat food items like Chocos, biscuits, chips, fries, Maggi, just fry, frozen desserts etc. These lead to increased consumption of HFSS- i.e high fat, high sugar and high salt containing food items!

Therefore some rules regarding eating habits should be followed at home;

- No eating in front of the screen or rather no eating while viewing TV/mobile/video games
 - Involve your child whether a girl or a boy, in the preparations of at least one meal of the day. You can start with evening snacks and non fire cooking. This is a chance to teach your child various measurements in cooking, making understand serving portions and demonstrate applied science too
 - Ensure that in the diet of your child, there are at least 2 servings of fruits and at least 5 servings of vegetables in 24 hours of a day; where one serving is equal to ½ cup.
 - Make food items aesthetically attractive, thus increasing the interest of your child in the food. Have at least one meal together
 - Replace highly processed foodstuffs with less processed or home-made options
 - Limit sugary drinks, sweets, fatty meats and salty or highly processed foods
 - Ensure adequate water intake, i.e. at least 2 to 2.5 litres of water per day.
3. Screen time: Holidays and especially this lockdown have led to increased screen time. However, as per American Academy of Paediatrics guidelines, for school age children i.e. 6-11 years of age, less than 1.5-2 hours of screen time is recommended per day. The content should be non violent and should be monitored by parents. Passive screen time is always more harmful than active, adult directed screen time. Use screen time as a reward so that 'earned screen time' is used efficiently. Ensure that screen time doesn't compromise the sleep and physical activity of the child. Also, behaviour of the child should be watched for, since excessive screen time can lead to hyperactivity, inattention, irritability and sleep issues. Ensure no screens during meals, no screens in bedroom and no screen 1 hour prior to sleeping time.
4. Physical activity: At least 1 hour of physical activity is recommended for these school children. Engage them in your own work out, power yoga sessions etc. Nothing like sharing the joy of exercise with your children. Here, you are modelling good habits too by setting an example

5. Reading time: If your child has already been bitten by the reading bug, you can make your child's reading time interesting by giving him/her assignments like finding 10 adjectives, finding 10 nouns, searching about the cities/places mentioned in the child's story book. This age group of children is ready to explore science principles, geographical places, chronology of historical events; Expose them to such kind of books and make small projects with your child on these topics. Do simple science experiments, make a map of your locality or route from home to school, discuss about the family tree of various dynasties and so on! Amar Chitra Katha has loads of issues based on historical and mythological characters. Similarly Tell me why, Nat Geo kids, Wisdom and many other magazines provide the material needed for these absorptive brains! Make reading pleasurable by associating it with art and craft; make bookmarks for the books, Make a cartoon strip or a picture book with your child.

If your child hasn't developed the habit of reading, you can start it now. Start with 15 mins per day; just 1 small story a day or 2 pages per day. But start. Read with your child, read to your child, reading together ensures that the reading time is not missed. Set goals for reading, like finishing together a book over a week or so! Reading actually reduces stress, improves memory, focus and concentration and induces better sleep. It increases vocabulary, improves communication and writing skills too

However, many homes support their child's not reading during summer with the reasoning that the child has to read so much in school days. But, this taking a break from reading leads to serious summer learning loss that can negatively impact long term academic achievement. This is called as SUMMER SLIDE. Students who read during the summer gain an average of 1 month of reading proficiency. Students who don't read lose an average of 2-3 months proficiency and over time, those lost months add up to years. By high school, 2/3 of the reading achievement gap can be attributed to summer learning loss during the primary school years. Also, starting each new school year, teachers have to spend an average of 4-6 weeks of re-teaching the forgotten skills and materials! Hence, we have to make a wise choice by choosing reading over SUMMER SLIDE

Thus reading is a must. Ensure your child reads-read newspapers, comics, children magazines, story books, history , mythology and so on. There are lot many options out there.

6. Hobbies: Yes, this is the time to develop hobbies. Utilize your child's leisure time in developing skills in art, craft, cooking, gardening, making scrapbook about interesting facts, music etc. See

what interests your child. Availability of internet has made pursuing one's hobbies much easier. There are tutorials for everything under the sun. All you have to do is search! Internet has also promoted the concept of 'Do It Yourself- DIY' and thus we are heading towards self learning rather than spoon feeding!!

7. Responsibilities and habits: This time of lockdown or rather holidays can be an opportunity to give your child household responsibilities and help in developing self esteem and feeling of competency. Household tasks like filling up the bottles, serving plates for dinner, sorting the laundry, cleaning and decorating a corner of the house etc can help in making your child a responsible individual. Giving the responsibility of taking care of one plant, observing how it grows, will not only introduce science to your child but will also stimulate emotional development. Developing habit of making the bed, organizing the wardrobe make the children more organized. Use rewards and token economy for reinforcing these habits and responsibilities.
8. Sibling relationships: Families where there are siblings can either have moments of cooperation and affection between the siblings or some moments of pity fights and quarrels leading to some amount of sibling rivalry. It is essential to maintain a balance between both. Hence, ensure that both children are given adequate attention. Both are praised for their strengths, target weaknesses individually and avoid comparisons! Engage in an activity which involves siblings together. Give them collective responsibilities as a team. This shall further develop skills of working in team cooperatively; evolving the family bond too!

So in a nutshell, during this lockdown, for your child have a schedule , monitor eating and screen time, stick to reading time, give at least 1 hour of physical activity, nurture the hobbies, develop habits and give responsibilities and utilise resources by making siblings a good team!!!

Some play links for 8-12 year old children

<http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie/activities/8-9>

<http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie/activities/10-12>

Some useful YOUTUBE links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZZ8bxrhxuo&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOP2dkijOIM&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dm9nKDxkTck&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdeWAWvoJkw&feature=youtu.be>

https://youtu.be/Gmh_xMMJ2Pw

<https://youtu.be/KQKAA9F169Y>

<https://youtu.be/dpCcrJpAuSE>

<https://youtu.be/ghUpA8XyymM>

<https://youtu.be/8uo7WAIZXGs>

<https://youtu.be/X655B4ISakg>

https://youtu.be/L_A_HjHZx

https://youtu.be/L_A_HjHZxf

<https://youtu.be/oc4QS2USKmk>

<https://youtu.be/BMrwW2gnWDw>

<https://youtu.be/FvTFukuK8cY>

<https://youtu.be/aNIphsJcno>

<https://youtu.be/ffDwMxCL4oU>

Dealing with Teens: In Times of Lockdown

Now let us talk about the period of adolescence! The Teens- 10 to 19 years of age!! This age group of young people don't think they are kids any more, but we the adults don't accept them as adults as yet! The adolescents face lot of turmoil during this transition period of childhood to adulthood. And unfortunately, most of the issues go unaddressed. This phase of 8-9 years duration is of immense changes-physical, sexual, hormonal changes which shall ultimately lead to complete development of an individual transitioning from childhood to adulthood!

We shall focus on the following areas while dealing with problems of adolescence:

1. ***Family relationship:*** As the child grows from a newborn to an infant, then a toddler to a kid to a school going child, the family as a unit also undergoes tremendous changes. However, as these school age children become adolescents, the family faces the biggest test of time. Lot many issues spring up between parents and their teen, which never existed before. This is a time of

turbulence in the family, which they have to handle together! Hence, we have to focus on some issues while handling this phase

- **Talk about physical and Sexual changes-** Adolescence marks the period of tremendous physical changes in boys as well as girls. There is sudden increase in height –also called as growth spurt; weight gain occurs due to increase in muscle mass as well as body fat; skin and hair changes occur. In girls, maturation of female reproductive organs occurs internally and development of breasts occurs externally; menstrual cycle regulation also begins. In boys, broadening of shoulder, change of voice and maturation of male reproductive organs occurs too. And we all have gone through these changes. But unfortunately, in very few families only these physical changes are discussed openly and distinctly; especially with boys where many changes go unnoticed as compared to girls! And as these young minds are curious to know about the changes their body is showing, they tend to resort to unreliable sources like magazines, porn and advice from peers! So, even though you feel uncomfortable or your teenager gets irritated by you bringing out the topic, still talk about it. Let your teen know that everyone has to go through these changes and its okay to be curious as well as uncomfortable about it. Let your teen know that you are there for him or her, and he she can approach you for any queries any time. Take the help of a doctor if needed; or use reliable resources available on internet.
- **Handling emotional outbursts–** The physical and sexual changes of adolescence are attributable to hormonal changes. There is an upsurge of hormones, increase in excitatory neurotransmitters in brain which lead to **emotional lability**– i.e. Rapid and exaggerated changes in mood occur, when strong emotions or feelings are experienced by these young people. There is expression of emotions on extremes- too happy sometimes, too sad at times, sometimes sudden anger outburst occurs, and sometimes they have feeling of shame and guilt. So, parents should handle these emotional ups and downs sensitively and discuss the issue when the young chap is not emotionally driven and can understand your piece of advice. Introduce them to anger management techniques like breathing exercises, talking about it, identifying triggers, taking help of exercise etc.
- **Handling your teen’s self consciousness–** Parents must have noticed, their adolescent has suddenly started getting conscious about his or her looks, his or her dressing etc. They become sensitive to other’s opinions and have increased receptiveness to peer influences too. There is increased sensitivity to public criticism. This can be attributed to a hormone called OXYTOCIN.

To handle this, avoid finding fault with the adolescent in front of others. If the matter is important and needs to be brought into your child's notice, wait until you can speak to the teenager alone. These teens also have exaggerated personal sense of uniqueness- they question- Am I different, Can anybody understand my problems etc. As parents, we should acknowledge the adolescent's unique characteristics and at opportune times, encourage a more balanced perspective by pointing out that you had similar feelings as a young teenager and acknowledge that the insecurity and uncertainty the teenager has about one's own identity is indeed difficult to deal with.

- **Handling idealism and criticism**– You will find your teenager criticising you, the neighbours, relatives and even society over different values and imperfections. They become the fault finders. As a parent here, we need to handle their remarks patiently and point out positives in the targets and make them understand that society and people are a blend of virtues and imperfections! No one is PERFECT!
- **Give them their personal space.** – The parents of teenagers face an important issue of not being able to talk to their teenager as they used to do in the past, when they were younger. Many Parents complain of getting distanced from their own son or daughter. This makes them insecure and then they try to force them to talk! This change occurs because, the teenagers are exploring their identity, they are trying to understand the physical changes in their body, they are spending more time with their peers, they feel their parents can't understand their situation! So to handle this situation, give space to your teenager, keep a watch on his or her activities but also don't be a helicopter parent. Let your son or daughter know, that you are there whenever needed.
- **Treat them as friends**– Yes! Treat them as equals. Parents often tell their teenagers, that they are not a small kid anymore and should behave maturely. Whereas at other instances, the parents tell the same teenager, that they are not old enough to comment on these adult issues. So, the teenager gets frustrated by these contradictory statements! And the parents are neither to be blamed here, nor the teen is at fault. What happens is that the brain of these teenagers is undergoing tremendous changes. There is increased connectivity between distant regions of the brain which leads to more complex, flexible and adaptive thinking. These teens thus develop abstract, scientific and systematic thinking. So they can now understand higher mathematics like algebra, geometry, they can understand relation among time, space and matter in physics and

they can even argue philosophically about justice and freedom. But these changes of brain are a work in progress, they are not fully mature. Hence, these young people have some difficulties in self regulation- leading to impulsive behaviour, acting without thinking, decreased self restraint and thus we call it 'childish behaviour'. Therefore, sometimes your son or daughter gives an advise like a mature adult and sometimes he or she has childish tantrums. So we need to treat them as friends, as our equals and respond patiently to their behaviours. Take their advice if it's really worth it and help them grow out of their childish behaviours by making them understand they can handle the situation in a better way.

- **Helping in decision making-** Teenagers are at an important juncture of choosing their subjects thus leading to vocational paths; they have to balance between their love for sports or arts with their ever increasing load of studies. In such scenarios, avoid making decisions for your son or daughter. Let him or her make small decisions of daily lives like whether to attend a wedding or not etc, show confidence in the decisions of your son or daughter. Model effective decision making and offer diplomatic suggestions by showing the pros and cons of alternatives, the possible outcomes and learning from poor choices. Your teenager might make a mistake, but this experience shall sharpen one's planning and decision making and help him or her to learn from poor choices too! Hence, explore various vocational options with your teenager, provide resource persons to talk and discuss with about the career options. Do not take decisions for your teenager!! Do not put your teen into the rat race of foundation courses for IIT, medical etc, when he or she has not even got a chance to explore about other fields!!!
- 2. **Screen time:** Keep a check on screen time exposure. Discuss with your teenager and set a limit; introduce the concept of balancing screen time with one's schedule, using screen in moderation only and let screen time be used as a reward which is earned after completing the homework or project work etc. The problem of Screen time exposure in this age group is multifaceted because of options available like internet, social media, gaming, TV, OTT platforms. Parents should know about the content being watched by their adolescent. Restrict access and limit social media. Use software to check on the browsing habits .Ensure no screen during meals, no screen in bedrooms and no screen 1 hour prior to sleep.
- 3. **Sleep Hygiene-** Puberty and hormonal changes lead to late sleep onset and thus late wake times. Also, The new found freedom of using mobile phones, laptops, heightened interests in peers and friendships and increased load of studies add up together as environmental factors competing with sleep. This leads to insufficient sleep and delayed sleep wake cycle. Hence,

recommended sleep amount of 8-10 hours should be targeted. There shouldn't be major discrepancy between patterns of sleep on weekdays and weekends. Therefore, ensure set bedtime, no Screens in bedrooms, no screen 1 hour prior to sleep and donot allow using the bed for other daily activities like eating, studying etc.

4. **Reading Time**– Reading in teenagers can help in giving perspectives to different scenarios. Reading fiction engages the teenager into evaluating stories, the characters in them, what they could have done and what they shouldn't have done etc. Discuss a book with your teenager, make reading goals, encourage writing book reviews, join book club, etc. With non-fiction, you can draw attention to history, science, and politics and have discussions over it. These young minds can give us a new perspective to a thought we might have been holding on to for long! Books can also be used to discuss the changes of puberty and adolescence. For those, who had not been bitten by the reading bug, as yet, you can start now. Start with newspaper articles, graphic novels, short stories like those written by Ruskin bond, Sudha Murthy, etc. Just start. Read with your teenager and make reading goals. Reading is dreaming with open eyes and these teenagers deserve to see dreams!
5. **Eating habits**: As the teens get conscious about their looks and as their body is showing changes, many of these young people go through phase of overweight, obesity or distorted self body images where they wrongly self evaluate themselves as too thin or too fat. And then exposure to internet, magazines and advice from peers leads them to food faddism or extreme dieting. However, this period is of increased nutritional need of the body. Hence, parents should ensure that, their daughter or son is eating well and doesn't have these body issues. If yes, it is absolutely fine to take medical help. So to sum up, as parents we all must focus on parent and teen relationship and simultaneously have a check on screen time, sleep hygiene, eating habits, promote reading, develop hobbies, give responsibilities , have confidence in your adolescent and most importantly believe in them

COPING WITH SIBLING RIVALRY

As long as there is more than one child in the house, sibling rivalry is inevitable. Sibling fighting often leaves Moms and Dads feeling exhausted and worn out by all the bickering and teasing, and wondering why their kids seem to fight so much. They may want to find out how they can promote a warm and

close relationship between their offspring that will carry forward into their children's adulthood. Here is some information about it.

Some of the following reactions we have heard from parents about how they feel about their children squabbling: angry, furious, helpless, out of control, exasperated, hopeless, powerless, sad, confused, disappointed, frustrated, overwhelmed, agitated, and less frequently, amused.

Some common forms of sibling rivalry

Parents are often amazed at the different forms that sibling rivalry can take and how creative and mean children can be to their siblings. Here are just a few of the ways that children can provoke one another:

- name-calling,
- blaming,
- poking,
- stealing things,
- lying,
- challenging a belief,
- arguing,
- simply looking at each other,
- breaking something that belongs to the other one,
- hitting,
- throwing something at the other one,
- hiding something that is important to the other one.

Some of these tactics are probably agonizingly familiar to you, and you can probably come up with a few more ingenious ways that your children seem to torment one another! To most parents, all the fighting seems so unnecessary, gets on their nerves, and can be upsetting because they don't like seeing their children hurt each other or be mean to one another. And many parents have added pressure because they feel like they have to resolve the problems like a wise old owl!

Why children fight

They may:

- get attention from you.
- feel powerful.
- get a break from boredom. Annoying a sibling may seem more exciting than anything else going on.
- connect with their sibling.

- get physical contact.
- become the ‘favored one’ in their parents’ eyes by making their sibling look bad.

These are all things that children need, but fighting with a sibling is not the best way for them to achieve these goals; you can guide them to find more appropriate ways to get their needs met.

What children learn from the fighting

- In addition, children actually do learn important life skills through the arguing they do with their siblings.

They learn to:

- deal with power struggles.
- manage conflict and resolve differences.
- be assertive and to stand up for their position.
- negotiate and compromise.

Parents’ Expectations vs. the Reality

Even with these positive outcomes that can result from siblings fighting, often the seemingly unending nature of the arguing can make a parent wonder: “Why do so many people have more than one child?” (and more specifically, “Why did I have more than one child?”)

Parents typically imagine their children would:

- be loving,
- not fight,
- be fair to each other,
- share and want to play nicely with each other,
- not seem to enjoy hurting each other,
- work together with kindness and consideration when they have conflicts,
- not want to annoy their parents,
- not try to kill each other if left alone with each other.

By accepting the fact that siblings will fight, and there will be times when they seem to do everything they can to hurt one another, you will not think that you must be doing something wrong, or that something is wrong with your children.

Once you come to terms with this inevitability, you will be in a stronger position to come up with plans for managing the fighting.

How your parents handled sibling rivalry

Another point to remember is how you handle your own children's conflicts can be influenced by how your parents dealt with rivalry between you and your siblings. Did you ever hear any of these comments from your parents when you were growing up?

"Just stop fighting; I can't take it anymore."

"Don't bother me with your silly fights; just work it out yourselves."

"I don't care who started it; you'll both be punished."

"Why can't you just be nice to one another?"

"If you don't stop fighting, I will tell your father/mother."

Sometimes you may find yourself responding to your children in the same way that your parents responded to you. This may be because you don't realize you are doing it, or you don't know how else to respond. But when you consciously think about which responses your parents used that were effective and which were not, you can find alternative and better ways to cope with sibling rivalry with your children.

- **Remember that sibling rivalry is inevitable to some degree:** It does not mean that there is something wrong with your children or with the way you are parenting.
- **Children gain some benefits from the fighting:** Even though it seems so pointless to you, the fighting and bickering do offer your children opportunities to learn life skills.
- **Let go of the idea that you can eliminate sibling rivalry:** You will be in a stronger position to manage the fighting and bickering when you give up any images of a totally harmonious relationship between your children.
- **Be aware of how your parents handled rivalry between you and your siblings:** This can help you to discard those approaches that you now see were not helpful and to be more intentional in using those approaches which you see were effective.

Factors that Influence Sibling Rivalry

Being aware of the factors that influence sibling rivalry can help you to be more understanding and help you to respond in more sensitive ways to the sibling issues that arise.

Birth order: The birth order of each of your children has an impact on them individually as well as on the sibling relationship. And your birth order in your family of origin also impacts you as an adult. Knowing the effects of birth order can help you to be more understanding about the underlying dynamics of sibling rivalries and the overall sibling relationship.

You can use this information to respond in more sensitive ways to the sibling issues that arise between your children.

Many studies showed that different birth orders carry their own characteristic response patterns because of the different experiences siblings in different birth orders have in their families.

First born: First-borns tend to identify closely with the parent who makes more of the decisions in the family, is more proactive, and task-oriented (traditionally the father). First-borns are interested in results and productivity, need to feel on target and tend to be perfectionistic, reliable, responsible, well organized, and serious.

Second born or middles: Second-born or middles tend to identify closely with the more expressive and emotional parent (traditionally the mother). They are interested in the quality of performance and tend to be in tune with people's emotions. Feeling that they 'belong' is very important to them. They often function as mediators, avoid conflict, are independent, extremely loyal to their peer group, have many friends, and are more likely to be a maverick. Sadly for them, there are the fewest pictures of these children in the family album.

Third born: Third-born tend to relate to pairs in the family (for example, two parents, two siblings, etc), are interested in maintaining balance in relationships between people, need to have choices and tend to use humor in dealing with situations.

Youngest: The youngest often look at the whole family picture and are interested in maintaining family harmony. They tend to be tuned into the emotions of the individuals in the family and the family as a group. They can be manipulative, not take responsibility for their actions, be perceived as show-offs, use humor to get what they want, and are frequently charming, precocious, and engaging.

Remember that this is not an exact or hard science and that not all children fit these expected characteristics. But it can be interesting to see how much or how little your children match the stereotype.

Each birth order has its advantages and disadvantages and no one position is really better than any other. Knowing this can help you be more empathic if and when your children complain about what

they see as the disadvantages of their birth order. This understanding can also broaden your perspectives and help you to broaden your children's perspective about their birth order.

It is also important to remember that sometimes your sibling position in your family of origin impacts how you relate to your own children.

For example, a father may have difficulty being sympathetic to his younger children if he felt, as the oldest in his family, that he had the burden of caring for his carefree younger siblings.

Or, a mother may struggle to sympathize with an oldest daughter if she always felt that her older sister had more privileges and was favored more.

A few other things to remember about birth order:

- Because no sibling can ever achieve the birth order status of any other, there is always unequal power among siblings; a second child may wish he could be first and a first may wish she could be the "baby."
- In blended families, as new children enter the family, they may lose their original birth order so the oldest **may find herself to be the middle** child. Such displacement often affects the sibling relationships.

Spacing among siblings can effect intensity of rivalry

Siblings who are close in age have high access to one another and are more likely to be physical with one another; siblings who are spaced further apart have less access to one another and tend to be less competitive because they usually spend less time together, are interested in different things, and are involved in different activities.

Temperament differences

Siblings who are temperamentally "easy" may be treated differently by parents than siblings who are "more challenging"; temperamentally "easy" children tend to be "liked" more, and children with more challenging temperaments may annoy their siblings (and parents) more. If there are differences in how parents react to their children, this could increase the intensity of the competition between them. Also, depending on each of the siblings' temperaments, they may be more or less likely to get along with each other. For example, a very active but emotionally sensitive youngster may "bug" his quieter, more sedentary brother to play with him, only to get hurt and upset when his sibling wants to be left alone to read his book.

Gender

In certain families, a child of one sex or the other may be preferred; if the child of the less appreciated gender is born, that child may grow up the recipient of such messages as “we wish you were a boy” instead of a girl. Such messages will influence how that child relates to her other siblings and can increase sibling rivalry, especially with the child who is the more desired gender.

Physical influences

Hunger, fatigue, illness, and developmental disequilibrium can affect siblings’ relationships, even if just until the children’s physical needs are addressed. Siblings living in a small house or apartment who have to share a room might argue more because of their close and frequent proximity.

Parenting style and family ambiance

Parenting approaches range from being very aggressive and overly harsh to very permissive and overly lax. Children raised in families at either end of this continuum tend to fight more.

- When parents are very strict, rigid, and use overly harsh discipline or corporal punishment, the children tend to fight more with siblings when they can get away with it because aggression has been modeled for them.
- Children raised in homes where the parents are very permissive or neglectful don’t feel that they get enough attention and don’t have rules to guide their behavior, so they tend also to fight more.

In the middle of these two extremes are families that:

- respect individual needs,
- treat children as unique and special people,
- foster cooperation rather than competition,
- and encourage a positive and loving connection to the family.

This approach helps to promote high self-esteem in the children. This, in turn, has an impact on the children’s relationships with one another; there will be less need to compete or to fight for love, attention and respect, or to prove their worth by denigrating a brother or sister.

Transitional times

Sibling issues often intensify when there are changes in the family, such as the birth of a new baby, when a baby becomes mobile, when a sibling goes off to school, when a sibling leaves the family for college or marriage, if there is a divorce or a remarriage, and so on.

Family circumstances

Although technically children may be raised in the same household, differences in the circumstances can alter their experiences. This includes such factors as the finances of the family at any given time, which parents worked and when, who was in charge of the children, where the family lived, and the nature of the parents' relationship at the time each sibling was growing up. All of these can impact the children's relationships.

Ages of your children

It can feel like the sibling rivalry between your children is on-going, never changing, and will never improve. Actually, the good news is that sibling rivalry does change as children enter different developmental stages and levels of maturity. This means that parents need to be flexible in responding to the conflicts that arise:

- Preschoolers: A "dog-eat-dog" period in which there is lots of fighting; parents have to intervene frequently. Young school-aged children – adherence to a new rule: "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," or tit for tat; parents have to intervene less often than when the children were younger.
- Older school-aged children: The "law and order" stage when children use rules to ensure fairness and protect against cheating; parents have to intervene even less.
- High school and beyond: The children begin to develop an adult conscience and to feel that it is not right to exploit a sibling; they can use conflict resolution techniques on their own if those have been taught to them.

Using this information to help manage the rivalry

- Use your knowledge of birth order to understand each of your children's positions and feelings; help them to see the advantages of their position.
- Consider the other factors that influence the sibling relationship so that you can be more understanding of your children's experiences and perhaps use this knowledge to mitigate the rivalry.
- Remain hopeful and optimistic by remembering that some sibling rivalry is inevitable and that as children mature and learn ways to handle conflicts, the rivalry will usually subside.

Strategies to Manage Sibling Rivalry

In the heat of the moment, when your children are in the midst of a fight that is really getting under your skin, you can feel at a loss as to what you can do to handle the situation. If you consider in advance an array of strategies you can pull out of your parenting tool belt, it may help you to respond effectively when your children are "itching for a fight" with one another.

Continuum of fighting

One of the questions that parents have about managing sibling rivalry is: “When should I intervene and when is it better to let the kids work out the disagreement themselves?” The following information can give you some guidelines about what might be an appropriate stance to take about when and how to intervene. We call it the “**green light to red light**” guideline. With this in mind, you can think about what your children need from you when they engage in fighting with their siblings. That can help you decide if, when, or how to intervene.

- **Green light**
Normal Bickering, minor name calling
Parent’s role – Stay out of it.
- **Yellow light**
Borderline, volume is going up, nasty name-calling, mild physical contact, threats of danger
Parent’s role – Acknowledge anger and reflect each child’s viewpoint.
- **Orange light**
Potential Danger, more serious, half play/half real fighting
Parent’s role – Inquire: “Is it play or real?” Firmly stop the interaction, review rules, and help with conflict resolution.
- **Red light**
Dangerous Situation, physical or emotional harm is about to or has occurred
Parent’s role– Firmly stop the children and separate them. If a child is hurt, attend to that child first, review the rules, and possibly impose a consequence.

Think about what your children may need at each of the levels

Do they need:

- attention, respect?
- outside help to stop the fighting?
- protection from getting hurt?
- time to work it out?
- guidance to process conflicts?
- ways to prevent conflicts next time?
- ways to make amends?

- ways to empathize?
- ways to forgive and reconnect with the initiator?

Thinking about what your children may need can guide you in how to handle the fighting, and when and how to intervene.

Establish Family Rules

One way to manage sibling rivalry between your children is to establish family rules in your home.

In terms of sibling rivalry, rules can set a tone and communicate your expectations about how you want your children to relate to each other. Having rules in place is a way to communicate your family values and forces you to think in advance about what behavior is important to you and what you want to enforce. Rules are an effective preventive strategy. You can refer back to the “family rule” when children fight or do not treat each other with respect. Include them in discussions about what rules should exist in your family in terms of how people should treat each other.

Here are a few rules that many families find useful to have in place:

- Handling conflicts and anger
“No hitting, use words to say what you are upset about.”
- Family Values/morals
“We treat each other with respect.”
- Parents’ role when there is conflict
“If I get involved, I will determine the outcome.”
- Hurt or property is damaged
“Whoever caused the hurt or damage must make amends.”
- Personal possessions and boundaries
“We don’t take someone else’s things without asking first.”
- Tattling
“No “tattling” to get someone in trouble; you can “tell” to get someone out of trouble.” For example, a child telling his mother that his sister just put her muddy shoes on the sofa is tattling; a youngster reporting to his mother that his young sister is standing on the sofa and is close to falling off is telling.

Problem Exploration and Conflict Resolution

Another invaluable tool that you can teach your children is the skill of conflict resolution. At first and when they are young, you will have to walk them through the whole process after each conflict. In time, they will be able to resolve their conflicts with their siblings and others on their own.

This process involves each child expressing his point of view and listening to the other child's point of view, generating a number of possible solutions that work for each of them, choosing one solution, and trying it.

This skill helps your children to navigate relationships with peers and is useful throughout life. It makes them feel competent and capable as they see that they can come up with solutions to problems without fighting.

Remember that in order to engage in a problem exploration process, the children must be calm enough to dialogue. Time out may be called until both are calm enough to proceed.

You can **model for your children when it comes to handling conflict:**

- Use “fair fight” rules yourself.
- Use cool off times to calm down first; then re-enter the situation.
- Give second chances and opportunities to make amends.

Other approaches

- **Use cool-off times**

First, help the children calm down, then address the situation by giving each child an opportunity to express his side of the story.

- **“The Plan”**

- Enter the room where your children are fighting slowly and quietly.
- Stand without saying a word.
- Take action, modeling calm and patience. For example, turning off the television or separating kids who are fighting.
- Describe what you see. For example, “I see two children who both want the remote control.”
- Explain the need for a “plan” – help them engage in a conflict resolution process.

- **“Notepad, pencil, one story” technique**

Have children work together to come up with one story they can both live with – this process helps them to see the other person's perspective.

- **The “sit and permission to get up” approach**

They can both get up as soon as they give each other permission to get up. An apology is not the key here (don't demand that they apologize); cooperation is key. Both children have power over the other one; they are interdependent. This helps them to calm down and then they can work on resolving the problem.

- **“You hit – you sit” approach**

Children need to learn that hitting is not an appropriate way to handle conflict.

Specific Tips

- Remove a toy children are fighting over.
- Separate children when they are fighting or teasing one another. For example, have them go to opposite sides of the room.
- Enforce logical consequences. For example, if they are fighting over who has control of the remote for the TV, the television gets turned off.
- Help children to express their feelings and to understand and empathize with the feelings of their siblings.
- Use time-outs, not to punish but to calm down and re-group.
- Give older children privileges as well as responsibilities.
- Help older children learn to ignore provocative behavior of younger siblings.
- Make tattling unrewarding.

Encourage Healthy Sibling Relationships

The following list is more general and encourages a parental attitude that will minimize rivalry. But remember, some conflicts will inevitably exist as long as you have more than one child at home.

Helpful attitudes

- **Expect many episodes of sibling rivalry:** It is normal for families to have problems, issues, and conflicts. Don't blame yourself unfairly for the way your children behave and don't set unrealistic goals for family harmony. What is important is that your children have healthy ways to work the conflicts out.
- **Treat your children as the unique individuals they are:** Make each child feel special. Each person's needs, feelings, and perspectives are important.
- **Don't show favoritism:** Do not compare your children to one another either favorably or unfavorably.
- **Stay calm and objective:** Stay out of arguments that are only harmless bickering.
- **Make need rather than fairness the basis for decisions:** In response to the common complaint from children that *“It's not fair,”* tell your children, *“Fair does not mean equal; it means giving each person what they need.”*

- **Come up with a list of basic rules:** Think about your family values. Examples of basic rules are “no hitting” or “no foul language”. Tell your children that things can’t always be done the way they want and that they can think and feel at the same time: *“When you are angry at Ruby, you can still tell her how you feel without hurting her.”*
- **Don’t look for someone to blame or punish:** Your children will learn more by working out the problem with each other.
- **Don’t referee a fight if you don’t know what happened:** Focus instead on the misdeed itself, invoke the already established family rule that prohibits the act, and disapprove of it. Remember, you don’t have to worry about “who started it;” you did, by having more than one child!
- **Don’t get in long discussions about what happened:** All of that attention you are giving your children is a reward for the arguing and fighting.
- **Encourage communication and understanding of feelings:** Help children to develop a sense of empathy and a respect for how their siblings feel.
- **Teach children how to solve problems:** Let your children know that you believe they can be creative about finding solutions to problems with their brothers and sisters.
- **Be aware of developmental stages:** Young children have a hard time sharing. They need to “possess” before they can share.
- **Do not force children to be friends with their siblings:** This may come in time, when they are ready, and through their own wishes. However, you can insist that they treat each other respectfully.
- **Don’t bemoan in the children’s presence that they “fight all the time”:** They will live up to the billing!
- **Don’t allow children to play one parent against the other:** Talk directly and privately with your co-parent if you disagree with a parenting decision.
- **Consider outside help:** If things seem to be out of hand you can seek out family therapy.