



Morning,
meals...

...and
bedtime!

These are the big three everyday events that drive siblings crazy in many families. But you can cut strife in your home by changing your parenting pattern...

Day after day, it's up to us to get our children off to school, put meals on the table and herd them into bed. If these everyday events are triggers for bickering, they can become such an ordeal.

So what can you do to make things run more smoothly? Try being a 'sorted parent'. Parents who are sorted take the time and effort to set up a routine and then do their best to stick with it. You may find routines restrictive and annoying, but when they work they can make all the difference.

Morning

Sorted parents know that if everyone is running around the house in a frenzy looking for lost reading books, the atmosphere is bound to be stressful. So they try to organise all the things their children need ahead of time. They realise that the same things have to happen at roughly the same times every morning, and they make sure everybody understands this.

Aiming for this level of organisation can remove endless possible layers of friction between siblings. Every item in the house has a home and everybody knows where it is.

Sorted parents also make sure everybody realises

there are certain things that have to be done every morning by a certain time, like getting dressed and brushing teeth. If their children are the type to get side-tracked, they might make a list of what needs to be done when, and tape it to the wall.

When you put your new systems in place and make a designated home for all the paraphernalia, it works better if you tell your children in advance what changes you are going to make and train them up. Show them exactly where to hang their coats and put their schoolbags so that they can find them all again. Remind them a couple of times what they need to do, and then on the day the new system takes effect they'll be mentally ready for it.

Your mornings should be calmer, so your children are less likely to squabble. But even if they do get into a row, by being reasonably sorted you'll have built extra time into the system to deal with minor blips.

Meals

Sorted parents remember that meals keep happening daily at around the same time. So unlike those of us who seem to be perpetually off guard ('Oh blast, dinner time again!') these parents have remembered to put a chicken in

What kind of parent would you like to be?

In their book *Sibling Rivalry*, authors Karen Doherty and Georgia Coleridge identify seven parent types:

○ **Pause parents** somehow stay calm even when their children aren't getting on. They try not to let low-level, everyday bickering get to them.

○ **Cheerleader parents** are great at fostering good sibling relationships by being positive. They use lots of specific praise to make each child feel appreciated.

○ **Tuned-in parents** are brilliant at helping children process the feelings behind jealousy and attention-seeking – and when their children argue they try listening to each one of them in turn.

○ **Physical parents** know that when children feel well, they're more likely to get on. They keep them off

junk food, shoo them outdoors in the fresh air to play and get them to bed on time.

○ **Sorted parents** are forward thinkers. – great at anticipating trouble between siblings and averting disaster by setting up clear boundaries.

○ **Commando parents** have natural authority and they're very good at being

in charge. Instead of pleading or nagging, they are clear about what behaviour is acceptable and what happens if children step out of line.

○ **Laid-back parents** encourage children to do things for themselves. They know some fighting is inevitable and they trust children to work through minor disagreements alone.

the oven an hour and a half before it's time to feed everyone. They might have thought through the week's meals, so there's no last-minute wondering what to cook.

This can cut down on sibling arguments by improving the atmosphere at mealtimes. If you're rushing around crashing saucepans on the stove and chucking plates and cutlery on the table because you're stressed and short of time, your children will pick up on it and ten to one they'll start taking it out on one another.

Instead of snapping out orders when their children drag their heels, misbehave or quarrel, sorted parents also try to give advance warning about what behaviour they want and what expectations they have.

Do you often find yourself yelling at your children: 'I told you, it's dinnertime. Turn off that TV now!' Or, 'If you don't stop kicking her under the table, there's going to be trouble.' This means no-one's going to enjoy their meal. You'll get more co-operation if you try telling them what you expect ahead of time:

- 'When dinner is ready, the TV gets turned off straight away – no excuses. We could pause the programme or record it and you could finish watching it after dinner.'
- 'From now on, there'll be no kicking or pushing each other at the table.'

Expect to remind them a couple of times. If you can stay calm, you'll find the whole tone at the table starts to improve.

Bedtime

Sorted parents are as busy as anyone else, but they might make it a priority to set aside time to relax with their children or read them a story. They set up rules in advance so children know when the TV gets switched off, which cuts down on endless fights about it just before bedtime. When your children know they'll each get a chance for a chat or a cuddle, they're also far less likely to wind each other up to get your attention.

Sorted parents also make sure everyone knows what's expected of them. With small children, you may need to talk them through all the little steps

Other 'big three' strategies

Sorted strategies not working as quickly or as well as you'd like? Give these a go:

✓ *Try being a laid-back parent.* Instead of nagging your children, try working on a solution together so that everyone begins pulling in the same direction.

✓ *Try being a cheerleader parent.* Cheerleaders are great at keeping their children on the right track by giving lots of praise. Telling your children what they're doing right encourages them to continue doing it. Praise them for doing what you've agreed and even for arguing less.

✓ *Try being a pause parent.* In the big scheme of things, it doesn't matter if you lose your children's pyjamas. If the routine is stressing you, take a few deep breaths, walk away for a minute and do what you can to keep your feelings under control.

✓ *Try being a commando parent.* Give information and use consequences. It helps to tell your children ahead of time what's expected. Once you follow through a few times, they'll know you mean business!

along the way, or make a list and tape it to the wall so they understand what is supposed to happen when. It's probably some combination of tidying up, bath, teeth and pyjamas and then it's time for a story. You could even draw it in pictures.

Once children understand the routine and know what they're supposed to be doing, they're less likely to disrupt their siblings' time with you or complain that you're taking too long. They'll grow to feel more confident that they'll get their turn.

About the book

Taken from *Sibling Rivalry Seven Simple Solutions* by Karen Doherty and Georgia Coleridge, published by Bantam Press in paperback, £12.99. Based on hundreds of interviews with parents, psychologists and teachers, the book highlights some solutions for bad sibling behaviour that will really make a difference. Visit www.karenandgeorgia.com for further information.

