



SIBLINGS AT WAR

Petty squabbles can evolve into lifelong feuds so why don't parents ensure their children get on, ask **Karen Doherty** and **Georgia Coleridge**

ASK people about their siblings and you'll almost certainly find that they have complicated, unresolved feelings about them. For every set of brothers like Jedward or sisters like Kylie and Dannii, who swear in public that they're inseparable, there are dozens more who admit they feel irritated, resentful or just plain ambivalent.

Feelings can run particularly high when siblings get competitive – think Noel and Liam Gallagher swinging punches on tour, or Joan and Jackie Collins, who reportedly can't bear to be in the same room.

With eight children between us, we find it somewhat reassuring that even nice ones from normal families can be horrible. They know each other's weak spots and go for them. The pointless, infuriating, low-level bickering can be a major pain in the neck. Many parents are at their wits' end over this – and yet there are others who say they're

anxious because their children hardly interact at all. "Maybe I was naive, but I always assumed my children would be friends," said one mother. "But a typical evening in our house is one boy texting his friends, another hunched over his GameBoy, and the third on Facebook. They do watch Top Gear together, but I can't believe that counts as quality family time."

Many children are also indignant about the way their siblings behave, and we heard some heartbreaking stories of how deeply some have been hurt, especially if the parents were never aware of what was going on. "My oldest sister bullied me for years, and somehow she always got away with it," said

'My sister held me down in a pool until I thought I would drown. She told my mother she was trying to save me'

one friend. "She once held me down in a swimming pool until I thought I was going to drown. She told my mother she was trying to save me. On my father's deathbed, he begged me to look after her. Look after her? After the misery she put me through?"

According to psychologists, sibling rivalry is extremely common. In a recent survey four-fifths of children admit that they physically attack their brothers and sisters. In one study, more than half the children interviewed said they had punched and tried to strangle their siblings in the past year, while 80 per cent had used minor violence such as slapping and shoving.

So why are most parents surprised and horrified when their toddler pushes the new baby? In fact, sibling rivalry isn't so hard to understand if you put yourself in your child's shoes. If your partner said he was getting another – younger and cuter – wife, would you honestly welcome her with open arms?

Would it be so odd if you wanted to make her life a misery? If you were the new wife, you might be tempted to undermine the incumbent and try to make yourself the favourite.

Even if your children squabble when they're little, there's still a chance they'll grow up to like and appreciate each other. But if you don't want to leave it to fate, here's how can you encourage them to get on better and become friends:

- Act fast when they fight. Turn off the TV, send them to their rooms.
- Don't take sides, even if it's obvious who the troublemaker is.
- Listen to them while they vent their frustrations.
- Make an effort to notice when they're actually being nice to each other.
- Don't compare them. Praise one child without mentioning the others.

■ *Sibling Rivalry* by Karen Doherty and Georgia Coleridge (Bantam Press, £12.99)

FAMILY MATTERS



Dispute: Madonna and her brother

CHRISTOPHER CICCONE'S EMAIL TO SISTER MADONNA

"I gave up my life to help make you the evil queen you are today. Fifteen years listening to your bitching, egotistical rantings, mediocre talent and a lack of taste that would stun the ages."

WRITER GILES COREN ON LITTLE SIS VICTORIA

"People always assumed I must be jealous, but you were my little sister. How could I be jealous? I considered you barely human. It would be like asking if I resented the cat."

JULIAN LLOYD WEBBER TAUNTS BIG BROTHER ANDREW

"I'm poorer and not so famous as Andrew, this is true. But I'm about a foot taller than the man. It means I could easily take him out in a fight if I needed to, and we all know that, as men, this is all that counts ... it's good to know I have the upper hand."

NOEL GALLAGHER GETS UPSET WITH LIAM

"I'm having a major disagreement with monkey boy, the singer ... it has been made virtually impossible for me to tour because Liam is such an idiot and he's losing it."

